THIRTY-TWO PAGES. ONE PENNY.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 368. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 18TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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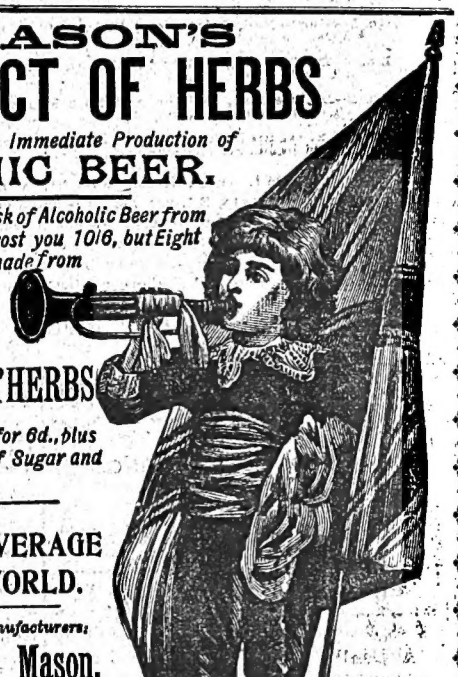

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No 368.—One Penny. January 18, 1896.

SHORT STORIES

ONE BLIND EYE.

DAWN was gradually spreading over the city—a cheerless midwinter dawn, begriming everything it touched.

In his studio Dockery coughed, and tucked his blanket closer round him on the lounge. The air was heavy with the damp chill of a room long untenanted, and its few bare furnishings, most of which were hardly unpacked, proved that their owner had but lately taken possession.

A torn shade dangled from the skylight. A sheet of dark crayon paper, left by some previous occupant, was pasted over a stove-pipe hole above the mantelpiece, and, like the rest of the fittings, it had gathered a coating of dust. A sooty, unused fireplace was below, with an empty grate, a dusty hearth, and a new bundle of firewood. Dockery had bought the firewood a week before, and being unable to afford more, was keeping this until luck should change or until he should positively need a fire.

All the unpacked canvases in the room were ranged face against the wall, whilst others lay in unpicturesque rolls about the floor. Dockery had picked a framed picture up the evening before, intending to hang it somewhere, and then, remembering it as one which had been refused by the "Society," and feeling a fresh sense of discouragement at the recollection, had left the thing where he found it.

Decidedly it was too cold to sleep. He raised himself on his elbow and looked at the fireplace, then rose slowly and stiffly from the lounge and dressed.

A forlorn-toned city clock struck six.

Dockery stumbled about the studio awhile under a vague impression that such an exercise would warm him. Finally he gave it up; the dull confusion of his quarters was too depressing. Buttoning his frayed overcoat, and pulling his hat firmly over his forehead, he left the studio and stole softly down the uncarpeted staircase. There was no one to hear him save the porter's family in the basement, but the fear of disturbing the least soul had become a habit with Dockery. Perhaps it accounted for his own poor place in the race.

Clear, bracing sunlight brightened the world when Dockery returned, but, instead of going up to his studio as usual, the artist made his way down a dark little staircase which led to the basement, and stopped at the porter's door. He stood a moment fumbling in the breast-pocket of his coat, and then knocked.

The porter's wife came to the door. She was a sinewy little German woman, with tight curling, tumbled black hair, piercing black eyes, and the warmest heart in the world.

"I—a—," began Dockery, for his mission was a little awkward to explain, "I—ah——"

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"Vy, goot morning! Goot morning!" she interrupted heartily. "You vater ees froze? My Villiam 'as been at de pump dose fifteen minutes. He vill 'ave it all fix soon, you see."

"Oh, no," cried poor Dockery, "that's not it, but you see," and he wore the funniest shame-faced expression, as, stepping into the kitchen where a window or two gave light from the court, he held something out to her which he had been keeping against his coat.

"Vy, de leetle cat!" she exclaimed. "Mister Dockery, vere he come from?"

"Why, I found him in the street," explained Dockery, with symptoms of genuine pride in his tone. "Poor little chap was nearly frozen, but he seems better already. I haven't anything fit for kittens to eat upstairs, so I just stopped to see if I could get a little milk from you, and after this get you to take extra milk and sell me some. Do—do you think a pint would do?"

"Pint?" cried the little woman merrily. "Pint? Wat leeetle cat can do wid a pint of milk? I will ged him some. Dere ees blenty here. Come, pussie—come. Ze leetle pussie!"

Such a mite of a kitten, like an overgrown black caterpillar, cuddled in the hollow of her hand. She took it over to the window.

"Are his eyes open?" asked Dockery, following her eagerly. "Why, what's the matter?"

The woman had given a little scream. She was holding the kitten away from her by the nape of the neck.

"What is it?" repeated Dockery.

Still holding the kitten at arm's length, she simply pointed at its head, saying:

"Black—an' de blind eye!"

"Blind, is he?" said Dockery, coming closer to the curled-up mite which hung from between her forefinger and thumb. "Poor little chap. Let me see. Sure enough, his right eye is gone, but I warrant you this one will be sharp enough for two. Poor little chap! Now, if you'll just get me something to feed him out of, I'll take him along."

To himself Dockery acknowledged that he did not like the way she was holding it. But now the little woman stared at him in astonishment.

"You not goin' to keep him!" she cried at last. "You vill not bring de bad luck in de house? Eet ees not goot de black cat wid blind eye to keep. No, no. Ve put him vere he vas."

"Oh, no," said Dockery. "Give him to me. He will be all right. I couldn't let him stay out in this weather, you know. When it grows warmer, perhaps——"

She let him take the kitten, and spreading her palms

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outwards, signified that she washed her hands of the whole affair. A moment later she shook her head distrustfully, murmuring:

"I no got use for de blind eye in a cat dat ees black. He bring trouble in your house. Eet ees de sure sign."

But her interest in this solitary lodger moved her to comply with his desire for something to feed his kitten from, and although she protested to the last moment, Dockery went up to his studio bearing with him a tin cup, an old teaspoon, and a forlorn little emaciated black kitten with one blind eye.

"So you bring bad luck to the house, hey, puss?"

Dockery stopped painting a moment, and glanced over his shoulder as he spoke. Since the kitten had joined its fortunes to his, he had been in the habit of keeping an eye on it, as he explained to the German woman downstairs, but such an interpretation hardly accounted for the long confidential talks in which Dockery revealed all his theories, his ambitions, and the reasons of his continued defeats, frequently ending with the gloomiest expressions of hopeless discouragement. The truth was that to the lonely artist in his unfrequented studio, the kitten had become as good as people.

"Are you bad luck?" Dockery repeated playfully, over his shoulder.

The kitten emerged from a shadowy corner, where, with precocious instinct, it had been scenting out the probabilities of mice. Fluffy, undressed black, it seemed to be, with an impertinent little look due to the necessity it felt of cocking its head on one side, the better to make use of its single eye. It came slowly across the floor on wavering legs, and when it reached the easel sat down beside it on its insignificant tail.

Dockery put the brush he was using between his teeth a moment, and, bending over, took the little fellow up. The brightness of the sunlit outer world came in at the skylight, and, with the sketches Dockery had tacked up, and the litter of wrappings and cordings which the porter's wife had taken out, the studio looked almost homelike. But warmth was wanting.

Beside the grate lay the bundle of firewood. Near by, against the wall, leant the "Society" picture without its frame. Dockery had disposed of the frame for a song, which paid the milkman's bill and a few inevitables, so that very little remained. But Dockery's manual labours had been lightened in the last few days, owing to the kitten's no longer requiring to be fed with a spoon. In evidence of this, the spoon lay shelved on the mantelpiece. The kitten's tin cup was—anywhere handy, and wonder was that Dockery never stumbled over it.

"I tell you," Dockery began, following out some train of thought aloud to his companion, "tell you, kittie, the world hasn't any use for you and me. It doesn't want us; it doesn't want us."

He paused awhile, and the kitten rubbed itself a little against his coat.

"They want to starve us out," he continued bitterly; "but I tell you what it is, if we have just a little turn of luck we will pack up our traps and go home!"

The weather grew bitterly cold. Dockery lived in his overcoat, and now and then marvelled at the paint-spots that increased upon it in spite of his precautions. Finally a great splash of oil appeared on his sleeves, and he felt constrained to forego his constitutionals, at least until it could be cleaned.

"Very handy garment, isn't it?" he asked, one bleak morning, as he helped the kitten into a side pocket. Then he began sorting out what brushes he was likely to need, and occasionally he thrust his hands into his pockets again.

"It's cold," he would explain apologetically, as his icy fingers buried themselves in the kitten's warm fur. "I think after a while we'll go down and ask the little woman, just as an excuse, you know, if we've any letters, and toast our toes at the kitchen stove. And I tell you what, the minute we get that letter, if there is one, we soak every paint rag with turpentine and set that wood in a blaze that will burn the chimney out."

The porter's wife knocked at the door as he spoke. After she came in her sharp black eyes were straying round the studio. Many little things which she had helped Dockery to arrange were missing.

"Oh, you been havin' some hard time," she exclaimed impulsively.

Dockery winced. It is painful to feel our misery: it is worse to have others see it.

"De leetle cat," she went on hastily. "Ah, Mister Docker, he bring de troub' ven he came in at de door. Vere ees he, dose days?"

"Well," said Dockery, returning to his easel, "for my part I'm not going to blame him for what has been happening months before he came." Somehow he did not feel inclined to tell her that the little cat was curled up in his pocket. There are times when the best of us like to temporise.

Dockery closed the door of his studio and dropped into a chair. The kitten blinked drowsily and shrank from the cold air. There was something uncanny about the little black upturned face which Dockery had never noticed before. It looked weazened, and there was a strange cunning in the small, darting eye. Dockery studied it intently for a long time and then, almost without knowing, he framed the old question:

"*Are* you bad luck?"

But nothing came of it. A sphinx would not have been less responsive, and finally Dockery went back to his easel feeling that he had lost his last friend. A freezing studio, a heavy heart, and an empty pocket were the sum of Dockery's equipment after that.

"Might as well be in the street," he grumbled drearily one morning when no sunlit air melted the thick frost on the skylight and he could not see to work. "Might just as well, and that's what we're coming to when the month is up. Hey, pussie, would you like to go back where you came from?"

The kitten rubbed itself against his feet. He had not petted it much of late, and his conscience reproached him when he saw how thin the little thing was beneath its fur. He picked it up tenderly, and the kitten licked his hand.

"It's a burning shame," cried Dockery, all unconscious of the hollows in his own cheeks, and ignoring, from necessity, the warnings of hunger. "It's a burning shame that a little thing like this, that never did anybody any harm, should be left to die of starvation in the street. No, sir, we may starve, but we'll have one square meal first." This last to the kitten, who purred contentedly until Dockery calmed down again and paced the room only to keep warm until it should grow light enough to paint.

But it did not grow light enough that day nor the next, and the day after dawned bleak and colder still. Dockery remembered that day all his life.

"I'm going off, Pussie, going to leave you to take care of the traps." Dockery spoke with difficulty from the numbness of his face. "Going to find some breakfast, puss. Look out for yourself," and, letting himself

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out of the studio door with care, that the kitten should not accompany him, he closed it and went down the narrow, echoing staircase.

The streets were almost deserted; here and there people hurried past with hands or muffs to their faces, and heads bent low. It was the first walk Dockery had taken for two weeks, and he felt stiff and numb. His eyes fell on his shoes as he came into the avenue where smart carriages were rattling along sharply on the frozen road, and a few gay pedestrians in furs passed with skates over their shoulders. They did not notice Dockery at all.

"Well, Tom Dockery! This is what I call a piece of luck. Well, well, well."

Dockery lifted his bewildered eyes to the face of the portly man whose hand was on his shoulder, and whose other hand was cordially outstretched. "Mr. Harris!" he cried.

"Exactly," laughed his friend, "and I hadn't the slightest idea you were in these parts. How long have you been here? Why didn't you look me up the moment you arrived, or send word so that I could drop in on you, and talk over the jolly times I spent at your place. Do you know, Dockery, I look back to those years as the best times of my life. How did you leave your mother and the young ladies?"

"My sisters are now married," answered Dockery, trying to conquer the burning consciousness of his shabby garments. "Mother spends half a year with each, and I have come here to see how the art public compares with the other 'lovers.' Oh, we've all scattered to the four winds."

They were walking up the street arm-in-arm, for Dockery's new-found friend had turned back in the direction he was himself taking, and Dockery's sensitive soul was suffering agonies at the attention they attracted, for "Mr. Harris" seemed to be a personal acquaintance of every other passer-by.

"I want to see some of your work. You know I've taken the collecting fever, and I've really picked up some treasures. I want you to see them and tell me what you think." Mr. Harris chatted briskly as they walked.

"I'd like to inspect the shop," he said, "if you are not too busy to see people. What is the address?"

"Well," replied Dockery laughing, "the fact is I've moved so many times in the last few months, I hardly know myself, but it is along here, and if you really care to run in, I would only be too glad to have you."

"Let's go, then," said Harris in his unaffected way, and Dockery took him to the studio, inwardly wishing that he had happened on Harris when "the studio" was situated in a more fashionable locality.

Mr. Harris, collector and philanthropist, followed Dockery up the half-dark little staircase, wondering what sort of a gem he might find in this odd corner, and how much Dockery would need to set him on his feet again.

"Rural things!" he exclaimed a few minutes later, his eyes glancing eagerly about the walls and then settling in a business-like way on the picture Dockery had been touching up for lack of other work. "Well, well, well!"—in genuine delight—"I hadn't thought of that; but it's a great thing. That's nice, that sketch of live-oaks; they look like real trees. I tell you it does me good to see something like that straight from Nature, without any fads."

"I painted a good-sized picture from that sketch," said Dockery. "It's lying about here somewhere."

"Good!" cried Mr. Harris. "Let me see it. Show me lots of things."

And Dockery, nothing loth, turned over his portfolios and unearthed canvases until Mr. Harris bethought himself of the time, and looked at his watch with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, there's a man waiting to see me at the club this minute," he explained. "He lives out of town, or it wouldn't matter so much. Now, I was coming to this in the course of time, but we'll have to settle things out of hand. I like those live oaks, and if you'll choose me a good frame that will set them off well, I'll be only too happy to foot the difference, and make it a place in my little gallery. Put your own price on it," he said, sitting down to the little table where Dockery kept his writing materials, and drawing out his cheque-book in a matter-of-fact way.

Dockery's head reeled. He remembered that he had modestly asked £60 for the picture in palmier days, but for the life of him he could not set a price now. Sixty pounds! His eyes strayed round the room as he tried to collect his thoughts; they fell on the empty grate.

Then he kicked the middle out of the bundle of firewood, and set the whole ablaze.

"Say a hundred, and call it square," suggested Mr. Harris, using the blotting-paper; "of course, I will settle for the frame. Now I must rush off, or I'll miss my man! I'm coming up again, though—you've got some good things here. I may come in with a friend of mine."

"But look here," cried Dockery, "Mr. Harris, this won't do."

"What's the matter?" asked the picture-collector quickly. "Of course, I'll put more if you——"

"It's already more than I originally asked," said Dockery, with a smile, "and I'm not going to take any such sum."

"Oh, well, we'll make that all right, if that's all the trouble. I'll come and choose a sketch or two. I'm glad I ran across you."

"I'm more than glad I ran across you," answered Dockery fervently. "By George, I—I had forgotten there were such people as you," he added, fingering the cheque.

Mr. Harris laughed uneasily as he moved towards the door. He hated to be thanked in the face, and, besides, he knew that he had found a rare good thing in Dockery.

"Bless me!" he cried, with sudden relief. "What have you here?"

Dockery followed the direction of his patron's eyes. "Oh, that?" said he. "That's a kitten."

"Looks like it," agreed Mr. Harris, his mouth twitching, for at sound of its name the kitten was coming over to its master, legs sprawling, tail dragging, and head cocked. Dockery picked it up.

"You see," he explained, "we've been roughing it together here."

"Well, he's a queer one," and Mr. Harris bent closer a moment to examine the mite. "Dockery," he exclaimed, "he has but one eye. I'd beware of him if I were in your place. No telling what malediction he may bring down upon your head," and laughing, the art collector made his escape.

"It's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways," Dockery called after him, at the same time tossing the kitten into the air, "and regarding this great and glorious city," he added, catching it, and nestling his face in its fur, "I think we've experienced a change of heart."

ETHEL.

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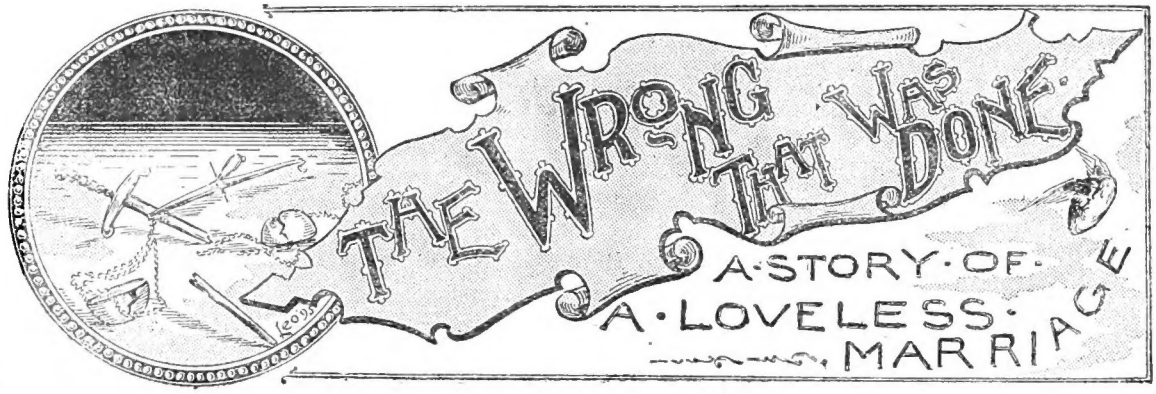

By E. C. WAGGENER.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIEF that grows more hopeless with the long hours of night often loses some of its bitterness with the dawn of a new day. So it was with Helen. Viewed in the clear light of day, there was a great deal in her conduct of the previous night for self-condemnation and regret. The storm of her anger, if not spent, was at least sufficiently lulled to allow her to reason calmly.

She felt that she had done wrong in condemning Gifford without allowing him to make an explanation; she should, at least, have given him a chance to defend himself. After spending the night in fierce, unreasoning anger, she began to feel a faint twinge of remorse for the harsh words she had spoken. And now they were past recall; she had driven him away from her for ever. What would she have given now to feel once again his strong arms round her?

And with her sudden regret came a strange longing for the woman who had either wilfully or innocently helped to ruin her happiness and wreck her life. Never, not even in the early days of their first separation, had she longed for Kitty as she longed for her now. And perhaps it was the memory of those childish days that caused her to do what very few women under the circumstances would have done. She hastily penned a few lines to Kitty, begging her to come at once. She made no allusion to her trouble, however, except in the pathetic line she added at the close: "If you ever cared for me, Kitty, you'll come to me now."

"She'll come just as soon as she gets my letter," was Helen's mental comment, as she hurried to the post-office. This done, she felt a degree of relief in the thought that perhaps Kitty would be able to explain many things that seemed very dark and mysterious now.

"I know she'll come; she can't refuse," she repeated over and over again during the whole of that miserable day—a day spent in restless wanderings through the little rooms, or pitiful attempts at housework, or, perhaps, an effort at reading, all of which were abandoned almost in the beginning.

By some lucky chance, no visitor dropped in, and Helen wondered vaguely if anyone knew of her trouble. But, of course, they didn't. Gifford, she was sure, had not been so foolish as to speak of it to anybody down at the station. Well, she would keep it a secret just as long as possible, for she knew well how scandalised her friends and neighbours would be, and what they would say, and she didn't want their pity or their sympathy. As to what she was to do and how she was to live she had no thought nor care. She would have laughed to scorn the idea that a long life lay before her. She had lived the whole of her life in the year and a half just ended, and there was nothing left her now but to die.

The long, desolate day ended at last, and, with the twilight, a cool, refreshing breeze sprang up. For a long time Helen stood in the little sitting-room, gazing into the fire. Presently exhausted in body and mind, she crept to her favourite seat on the verandah, and looked absently out at the green, undulating meadows, the little brook that went winding past the village, and the woods rising dark and solemn and still beyond. Then, when the moon dropped behind the hills, and one by one the lights went out in the village, she staggered in as one blind, groping her way to the bed, lay down, and in a few minutes had sunk into a broken, haunted sleep.

Strange dreams came to her in that sleep—dreams of

To feel once again his strong arms round her.

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shadowy forms and faces flitting ever mockingly before her—visions of grotesque figures with hideous, grinning lips, and glimmering lights that danced before her eyes, then faded away, only to appear as suddenly again. Was it a horrible nightmare? she wondered. For, through it all she was dimly conscious of familiar sounds; the noise of a closing door; the clear, sweet tinkle of sheep-bells; the fragment of an old, half-forgotten song, borne on the summer wind, and the confused murmur of voices that sounded indistinct and far away.

Yet the shadowy faces never left her. Sometimes they were the faces of friends, long since dead; sometimes it was Kitty who bent over her pillow, but oftener it was Gifford, who looked at her with such stern, reproachful eyes that she longed to cry out and beg him to go away.

And when at last she woke she saw the sun shining in at the open window, heard the song of birds and the drowsy chirp of insects in the grass—saw and heard without the power to lift her head from the pillow. What strange weakness was this which had come upon her? she asked herself wonderingly—this inability to throw off the spell of those terrible dreams?

Surely that was Kitty sitting yonder by the window. Yet, if Kitty, how changed she was, and how pale and haggard her face looked with the sunshine streaming full upon it.

Presently, as if in answer to the mute questioning of her eyes, the figure rose and came over to the bed. Yes, it was Kitty, sadly changed, it is true, but with the old tender light shining in her soft brown eyes.

"You are better, dear?" she said, kneeling by the bed and passing her hand fondly over Helen's hair.

"Better?" and there was a vague wonder in Helen's great hollow eyes. "Why, have I been ill?"

"Yes, but you are much better now."

"How long have I been lying here?"

"A week."

"A week!" whispered Helen, trying to raise her head from the pillow. "And it seems that I have been asleep for years. But it was only a dream—a horrible dream! What are *you* doing here? and where is Gifford?"—a strange, wild light came into her eyes.

"I came to nurse you, dear," said Kitty soothingly.

"I remember now"—and there was such pain and reproach in the weak voice that Kitty's face blanched to an ashen hue, and the hand she had laid on Helen's head was suddenly withdrawn.

"You must tell me everything—*everything*, I say!" cried Helen, raising herself by a strong effort and catching hold of her sister's hand. "That is why I wanted you, that is why I sent for you. *You* deceived me, too! You said——"

She broke off suddenly, and lifted her hands to her head. "Don't leave me, Kitty, don't leave me!" she whispered brokenly.

Lifted her hands to her head.

"You know I will never leave you, Helen, never again," said Kitty, her eyes misty with tears. "And I will sit here and hold your hand, if you will be quiet and try to sleep."

"Sleep! I feel that I will never sleep again!"

"But you must, or you will be getting worse again. There, take this, and presently, when you are quiet, I will answer all your questions."

Helen took the medicine passively, and in a few moments Kitty had the satisfaction of seeing her fall into a quiet sleep.

Something more potent than Helen's letter had brought Kitty back to Looe. A telegram from Gifford had come to her, bidding her come to Helen at once, as she was in deep trouble and needed her. That was all, but it was sufficient to cause her to make a few hasty preparations and take the train for Looe in two hours after receiving the message. She had reached the cottage to find her sister alone, and raving in the delirium of fever.

Either fortunately or unfortunately for the sick girl, nobody had chanced in, so it was not difficult for Kitty to assume the responsibility of answering the questions which poured in from every quarter when it became necessary to summon a physician from Mallingford. She gathered some idea of the nature of Helen's trouble from the poor girl's incoherent words, and to those who called for the purpose of offering their services she simply explained that Gifford had been unexpectedly summoned from home on a matter of important business.

CHAPTER IX.

"Now you must begin at the beginning, and tell me everything. I won't wait a minute longer. You've put me off from day to day, as if I were a child to be coaxed or frightened into keeping silent, just as it pleased *you*."

Helen was seated in an easy-chair by the window, her head supported by a pillow, her grey eyes looking larger and more wistful than usual because of the hollow cheeks and bloodless lips.

"If I have not told you, it was because you were not strong enough to bear excitement of any kind," said Kitty gently, "and because I was afraid what I would have to tell you would make you hate me. Oh, Helen, I deceived you from the very first, and now when your life is ruined, and it is too late for me to make any reparation, you ask me for the truth. How can I tell it? How can I say things that will cause you to turn against me?"

"Nothing you can tell me now will make me hate you," said Helen wearily. "I think I am past all hating, or loving."

"There is so little to tell that I could say it in very few words, but it would make it none the less hard," said Kitty, coming over to her sister's chair and kneeling beside it. "I met Gifford for the first time at a fancy dress ball at Aunt Dorothy's—"

"Then you knew him before you came home this last time?" interrupted Helen in great surprise. "Oh, Kitty, how *could* you deceive me so?"

"Don't look at me in that reproachful way, Helen, or I will never be able to tell you anything."

"I won't interrupt you again," said Helen a little impatiently. "Go on, and tell me the rest."

"I think I cared for him from the very first," continued Kitty in a low voice, and hurrying over her words as if eager to get through with her story, "and when, two months afterwards, he told me that he loved me and asked me to marry him, I consented without any coquetry or hesitation. And I would have been the happiest girl in the world but for one thing. Aunt Dorothy was bitterly opposed to my marrying any one, and especially Gifford Vane. I never knew why she conceived such a strong dislike to him, but I know she made me very miserable at times by her cold, almost insulting, attitude towards him, and by her strange behaviour to me.

"I was too much in love, however, and too self-willed to

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allow her to interfere with any of my plans, and boldly declared my intention of marrying when and whom I pleased. Gifford seemed to fear her influence, though, and made me promise not to listen to any charges she or any one else might prefer against him.

"Then, one day, when he was absent from the city, his uncle, an eccentric old man of whom I had never seen or heard before, paid me a visit, during which he informed me that he had other plans for his nephew than marrying me, a poor dependent girl, and that if I persisted in keeping my promise to Gifford I would bitterly regret it. He refused to explain anything, saying that Aunt Dorothy could tell me why it would be best for me to break my engagement with Gifford. Then he went away as suddenly and mysteriously as he had come."

"And what did Aunt Dorothy say?"

"She declared that Gifford was an adventurer, that he was addicted to all sorts of excesses, and that if I didn't promise at once to break off with him she would turn me out of the house. But I can't tell you all she said. I only know she said enough to cause me to declare that I would leave her house and never willingly look upon his face again. And I kept my word. I went away the very next day, telling no one of my destination, and caring very little what became of me. I never saw Gifford again until I met him here in Looe."

"You acted very foolishly," said Helen with a sad little smile. "If you cared for him you shouldn't have allowed Aunt Dorothy or any one else to have come between you."

"I did write to him afterwards, but no answer ever came to my letter. And something happened soon after I left to further strengthen my determination to give him up. I received, almost by accident, a long letter from Valentine Beverly, in which he reproached me bitterly for treating him as I did, and for ruining his life. That letter, coming to me just when it did, gave me such a shock that for many days afterwards I was too miserable to think of anything else."

"But I don't understand," said Helen vaguely. "What did Val Beverly have to do with your caring for Gifford and marrying him? And how had you ruined his life?"

"You will understand presently. When I came home after uncle's death, and found Beverly there, and knew that our stepfather was planning to get me to marry him, I was very angry, and made no effort to conceal the state of my feelings. But when I saw that my contemptuous treatment of them both had no effect, the idea suddenly entered my mind to change my demeanour—to pretend that I was not averse to their plan, and to lead Val on until I was sure he cared for me, then to refuse him at the last moment, and so put an end to our stepfather's scheming.

"I was young, and foolish, and headstrong, and knowing Colonel Beverly's great fondness for Val, I thought it an easy way to have revenge for the slights and ill-treatment I had been forced to endure ever since our mother's death. I knew his sole object in wishing me to marry Val was to prevent me from forcing him to leave the house. Once married, he imagined we would all live peaceably together, and that I would give him no further trouble about the property. Besides, we had been at dagger-points so long that I think he was getting tired of it, and wanted to be left in peace.

"Val was very handsome, and just vain enough to fancy it the easiest matter in the world to win me. Perhaps he

"I met Gifford for the first time at a fancy dress ball."

really did love me. In every bad man's life there is some attachment, I think, that in its beginning was pure, and honest, and true, and it may have been that his love for me was of that sort. I know I led him on from day to day until I believe he would have committed almost any foolish deed if he thought by so doing he could please me.

"We were engaged, and I even went so far as to fix the wedding-day, feeling a sort of savage delight in the thought that my revenge was so near at hand. Colonel Beverly was delighted over his apparent success, and treated me so kindly and with so much consideration, that occasionally I felt a little compunction of conscience for what I was doing, especially when I saw his heart was bound up in Val—he who was so callous to everyone else. But I stifled all such twinges of remorse, and one night, just a week before the day set for the wedding, in the presence of Colonel Beverly, I quietly handed Val his ring, and coolly informed him that the matter had gone quite far enough, that I had never had any intention of marrying him, and that he should leave the place at once.

"Of course there was a scene. Val pleaded and threatened

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by turns, and looked so wretched and desperate that I was a little frightened, while Colonel Beverly stormed, and raved, and swore that I, not Val, should leave the house, and at once. Feeling that I had gained nothing by my foolish act, the maid hurriedly packed my trunk, and I went back to Aunt Dorothy, with the firm resolution never to return home again, or, at least, while Colonel Beverly lived.

"For a few weeks I thought of Val only occasionally, yet always with a feeling of regret for what I had done. Still, I don't think I quite realised the wickedness and cruelty of

"The maid hurriedly packed my trunk."

my conduct until his letter came full of such bitter reproaches. I didn't stop to think that a worthless man like Val Beverly could hardly be ruined by the ill-treatment of any woman. I felt that in having to give up Gifford I was being punished for treating Val as I did, and the conviction came to me that I was not worthy of the love of any true, honest man. And when I came home two years ago and found that Gifford was living here in Looe, that he was in the habit of visiting you, and that you had learned to care for him, what else *could* I have done, Helen, but keep silent as to the past? And when I remembered what a lonely, unhappy life you had led until he came, I felt that I could not wrong you more than by coming between you and his love."

"I went back to Aunt Dorothy."

"But he didn't care for me, and you knew it, so there is where you did wrong," said Helen bitterly. "I think I understand your motive, but you didn't do right when you deceived me."

"I know it now, when it is too late," said Kitty sadly. "Yet Gifford and I could never have been happy if we had married," she added quickly. "Do you suppose I could have had one moment of happiness knowing that you were miserable?"

"But am I not miserable now?" asked Helen passionately. "Even as his wife, am I not the most wretched creature living? And perhaps if I had known the truth at first I would have learned to forget him."

"You said once that it would kill you to lose him."

"Did I? Well, I have lost him and am still living, so you see how foolish it was of me to say such a thing. Oh, Kitty!"—with a sudden uplifting of the thin, nerveless hands—"go away and leave me to myself a while. My mind is too weak and my heart too heavy to bear any more."

(To be concluded.)

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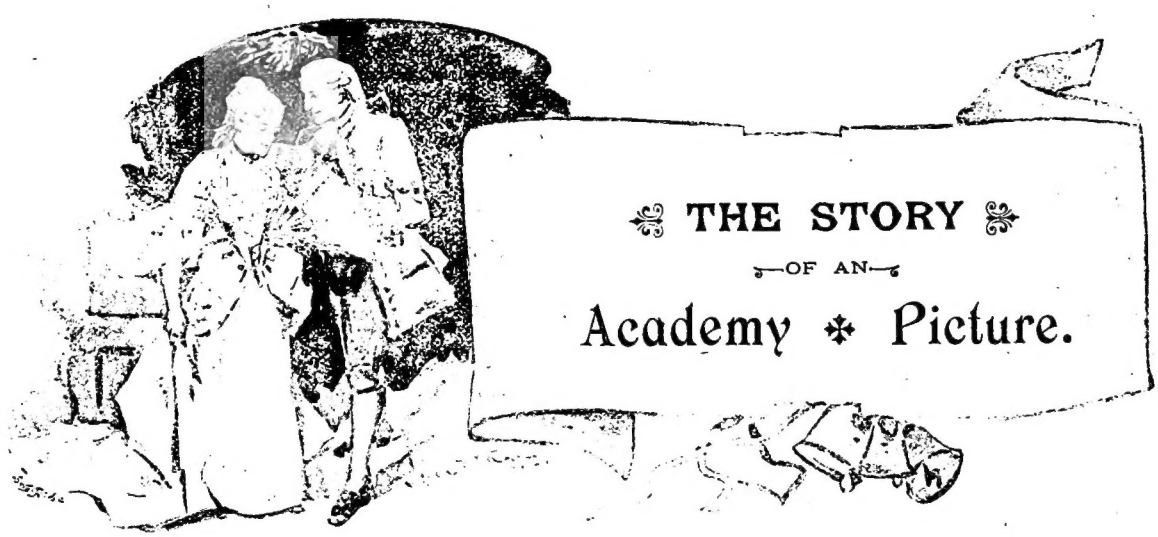

THE STORY OF AN Academy Picture.

CUTHBERT RYVEER and his cousin Reginald had lunched sumptuously in the little sitting-room opening into Cuthbert's studio, and were reviling men, women, and Royal Academicians to an accompaniment of coffee and curaçao. Reginald did most of the reviling: he had had four pictures returned on his hands by the hanging committee, had been abroad ever since, and had been finally rejected in Paris by a lovely American to whom he had offered his hand and heart intermittently as he followed her and her parents from Florence to France.

"Though why you want to marry, and why you want to paint pictures, I cannot understand," said Cuthbert, in concluding what he considered a neatly expressed speech of cousinly condolence.

"Why not?"

"Give me half your income and I'll show you why not."

Perhaps Reginald Ryveer thought the price too high too pay even for the edifying example of his cousin's methods of enjoying idleness and celibacy; for he only sighed and said: "I shall have to marry Emily."

"I'll be shot if you do!" said Cuthbert. Emily was a cousin of both, who had been selected as an appropriate match for Reginald by their parents, owing to the fact thas she was as rich as he was, and Cuthbert had other views on the subject. "Dash it! I hope he's not thinking of Emily seriously," he murmured to himself. There was a look of profoundly meditative melancholy on Reginald's face at that moment; as a matter of fact, he was trying a new brand of cigars, but his cousin did not know that.

"I must divert his thoughts," reflected Cuthbert, picking up a letter. "What do you make of that?" Reginald Ryveer read it.

DEAR SIR,—I propose calling upon you to-day, and hope I shall find you at home. You have severed two hearts, and I shall ask you to reunite them.

Yours truly,
ROSALIE WEST.

"Good handwriting and paper," he said as a comment. "What does it mean?"

"Dashed if I know! Good address, too. Big place in Berkshire, near where I painted last year; but I never spoke to a soul there, though I know some Norths in the county. There are the Easts, too, in town, but I know no one called West. Would you mind seeing her for me, old chap? It might be awkward."

"You're very kind," said Reginald. "In fact, you always were. I think this time you shall handle your own chestnuts." And the subject dropped.

"You have three of your daubs in the Academy," said Reginald after a pause—"two figures and a landscape. You can't paint landscapes."

"There are two figures in the landscape," said Cuthbert modestly. "People like sentiment and sunshine. In combination they are irresistible; besides, one of the figures is you."

Reginald groaned. "Not the thing for which you made me sit for two hours on the back of a chair, with my arms round a pillow? They never took that?"

"They did," said Cuthbert. But at that moment his housekeeper came in to clear away lunch. When she had half finished, she said suddenly: "There's a young person, sir, in the studio, named West." Mrs. Simpkins regarded all models with an eye of disapproval, and was inclined to include Cuthbert Ryveer's lady-sitters in the same category.

"Good gracious, Mrs. Simpkins!" said Cuthbert. "Has she been there long?"

"Half-an-hour," said the good lady composedly. Cuthbert whistled, and looked appealingly at Reginald; but he only shook is head and winked derisively. "I suppose I must go," said Cuthbert; and, fortified by another liqueur, he entered his studio.

She was walking up and down impatiently. She was very tall and very pretty. So much he saw before she saw him, and began:

"I am sorry if I have called when you were busy," she said (he bowed); "but my business would not wait." (He nodded.) "I have called about a picture of yours in the Royal Academy, called 'Rushcroft Lane'—Rushcroft Lane," she repeated. "It would not have mattered half so much if you had not put the name."

"If you want to buy it," said Cuthbert, "you should apply to the proper person at Burlington House. I

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never sell my own pictures." Cuthbert Ryveer was rising, and inclined to give himself airs.

"I don't want to buy it," she said, "I want to burn it."

"Anything else in a small way?" he asked. "Will you kindly explain?" ("Beautiful, but quite mad!" was his mental ejaculation.)

"Certainly I will explain," she said in a tone of more or less calm indignation. "You have painted Rushcroft Lane, with me in it in my red skirt and my big straw hat with a red handkerchief round it, so that every one can recognise it; it was most ungentlemanlike!"

Cuthbert Ryveer did not like the last word. Some men run from an angry woman, some give in, some fight. "My dear young lady," said Cuthbert, "I understand you now. After I had painted Rushcroft Lane for three days you settled yourselves in the middle distance while I ate my lunch. You spoiled my view of the church tower through the gap, so I put you in instead; you both appeared so—contented—I did not like to disturb you," he added drily.

"Both of us!" she exclaimed, getting crimson. "Both! You call that Edwin?"

"I don't call it Edwin or anything else," said Cuthbert calmly. "Does 'Edwin' consider himself libelled?"

"No; but I do."

"You!"

"Yes, I," she said; "I asked a barrister cousin of mine, and he says I could sue you for libel—I've written it down to remember it—'sue you for libel, and, perhaps, make you a third party to an action for breach of promise of marriage, if I sue Edwin for that'—there." She had glanced at some pencil-notes on an envelope, which she returned to her pocket. Cuthbert looked puzzled. "Don't you see," she went on, "the man in your picture is leaning over me, and Edwin only comes up to my elbow. He is wearing a brown coat, and Edwin always wears grey; he has square shoulders, and Edwin—well, poor Edwin's figure is his weak point," she said, relaxing into a smile.

"He ought to be flattered," said Cuthbert.

"He isn't, though," said Miss West. "He's furiously jealous. It's no use telling him I never did such a thing; I've told him again and again I never sat on a stile with anyone but him, and I never have—on that stile. But it's no use my saying anything; he's broken it all off and sent back all my presents—and—and, unless you can make it right, I must send back his."

She looked quite tearful now, and it became her better than anger. Cuthbert was touched.

"My dear Miss West," he said, "I will do anything I can. By Jove!" he added to himself, "she's as pretty as Emily—or nearly so."

"Of course, it all rests with you," she said; "how could you do such a thing?"

"I have told you how I put *you* in," he answered. "I apologise for the skirt, but it was the one bit of colour the picture really wanted. I am very sorry. And the big hat was charming."

She had on a big hat then—a big broad-brimmed hat with tulips nodding in a bunch of bold colour on top of it. She glanced at it in his long pier-glass as he spoke, and she looked mollified.

"But Edwin?" she said. "You can't say it's like him."

"Edwin," he answered, hesitating—"I beg his pardon, I know him by no other name—Edwin, no doubt, has great qualities of—heart—and that sort of thing: but——"

"Well," she said sharply, "what of that?"

"Well," he continued, "it struck me that Edwin's figure was not quite what was wanted as a complement to yours in the picture."

"Poor Edwin!" she said, not apparently offended: "we did not think of that. He is a little—fat, certainly; but the other man must have a lovely figure, or was he out of your head?"

"No, he's a real man, and he has a good figure—I've flattered him, of course—he's my cousin. He's in the next room now, and he's never been in Berkshire."

"I believe," she said, "Edwin has been inquiring everywhere whether anyone has seen a very tall man in our neighbourhood; he knows I like tall men. Poor Edwin!" she added absently. "I wish he had broad shoulders and was a nice height to dance with. Did you say *he* was here?" she was blushing a little as she looked up, and the tulips were nodding on top of her hat.

"She's really quite as pretty as Emily," said Cuthbert to himself. "I wonder if Reggy is thinking of Emily all this time?" He forgot to answer her question; he was thinking so much about other things. And she spoke next.

"Did I really sit just as you painted me?" she asked.

"Well, of course," said Cuthbert, "Edwin could not look down into your eyes quite like that. I should think Edwin's arm comes about right for your waist when you are walking."

"Pardon me," she said rather stiffly, "we are forgetting what I came about; will you write an explanation and send it to Edwin, or to me; and perhaps your cousin will write one also? 'Edwin Delaine, Esquire, Beachgrove House.'"

"I remember the place; it's a very pretty one. Is it his?"

"Yes," she said, "when his old uncle dies."

"It reminds me of one my cousin has in Hampshire," said Cuthbert irrelevantly. "I'll make it all right, then, and Edwin—I beg his pardon—Mr. Delaine shall have his explanation."

"Did you say your cousin was here?" she said; "perhaps I had better see him, then I shall know it's all right. Of course, I believe you, but if Edwin saw him afterwards, and he was not like the picture, it might be awkward. Poor Edwin is very, very jealous, I am afraid."

"Poor Edwin!" said Cuthbert to himself, as he went to fetch his cousin. "She's a deuced pretty girl, and would make no end of a picture in that big hat she has on."

"Poor Edwin!" said Cuthbert again an hour later, as he ordered tea. "I think she might talk to me a little more." And he added, in a louder voice: "Don't you think that if you are still in doubt as to whether the likeness is correct, Reggy, you might take Miss West to the Academy and look at the picture again? I have a sitter due now. This west window is capital in the afternoon."

A week later he had a note, which ran thus:

DEAR BERTIE,—Miss West says you need not bother to write to that Delaine fellow.—Yours, in haste, R. R.

He looked at the post-mark. "Poor Edwin!" said Cuthbert Ryveer.

PETER PARR.

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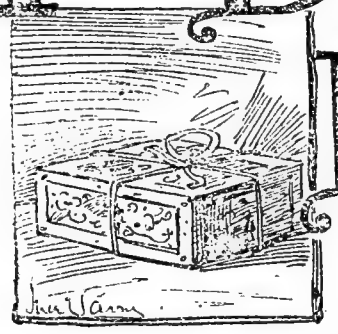
The Bottom of the Bon-Bon Box



IT was two o'clock. The month, April—between two showers—April, smiling with sun, under an azure sky, with fleecy cloud-drifts like bits of thistle-down; the carriages rolled noisily, the idle strollers joyously dawdled through the crowded streets so recently washed by a tepid rain.

Whirling with the rest, the dark green brougham of the Baronne de Rozier turned the corner of the Place de la Trinité, passed swiftly the stormy cross streets of the Boulevard Haussman, rolled briskly down the Chaussée d'Antin, to suddenly pull up with a jerk that bounced the Baronne like a ball upon the mellow, myrtle-green, gold-buttoned cushions of her luxuriously appointed equipage.

With the shock came a cry, yells, hoots, *badinage*. She hastily pulled down the glass, to find herself the centre figure of a jostling crowd—talking, ordering, gestulating with that furious sympathy and exasperation peculiar to excited mobs. A ragged *gamin*, with hands in his pocket, leapt to the carriage step to thrust out his tongue at her; a street fakir spied her and reviled her with a volley of slang; the coachman's whip plied right and left like an angry black snake; and the Baronne, mad with terror, was out of the carriage and pushing her way to the pavement with the energy of despair.

Once there, she threw herself into the first open door—a cake and cream establishment, passed like a bomb into the *crême salle* behind it, to fall upon a chair, pale, breathless, swooning.

She came to herself slowly. Happily the luncheon hour was over, the pastry-room empty, the shop girls with nothing to occupy them were free to crowd about her pityingly, with all the zeal of their tender hearts and the remedies learnt from romantic novels. They loosened her veil, removed her hat, unbuttoned her coat and bodice, and even contemplated an attack upon her corsets.

And the Baronne, hearing everything, the stir and commotion, but unable to move or speak, remained inert and strengthless upon her chair.

"Come, come, be quiet, girls; she's all right now, I think," said a sonorous, deep-toned voice—a man's voice, rising authoritatively above the shriller chattering of the excited damsels.

The Baronne, opening her eyes, saw a tall form bending over her; also, that it was snugly buttoned into a well-fitting overcoat; that the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour peeped from under the left lapel, and that the figure was crowned, as her gaze languidly travelled higher and higher, with a face that made her sit bolt upright with a little cry:

"You, Richard!"

It was his turn now to start, gaze at her blankly, drop her wrist as if it burnt him, and repeat the cry:

"You, Armande!"

Suddenly resuscitated, the Baronne sprang to her feet, rehooked her *corsage*, smoothed down her skirts and her hair with a sweep of the hand, readjusted her loosened jacket, and once more turned upon the astonished gentleman the dazzling beauty of her five-and-thirty years. Then, content with herself, sweet as honey, serenely calm, she advanced upon him with outstretched hand.

"Monsieur, need you stand there as if planted?" she said.

He bowed profoundly.

"And to think, too, Richard"—she paused on the name doubtfully and a little reproachfully—"that you did not know me; that you still refuse to speak to me."

This was too much; the gentleman called "Richard" unbent in spite of himself.

"I really did not," said he. "As for speaking, you gave me no time. Moreover, *ma bonne amie*, one does not seek, as a rule, to crush old acquaintances precisely in this way. Divorce does not even warrant it."

"What is it you say—crush old acquaintances?" raising her hand with an appealing gesture.

Meanwhile the little waitresses, seeing the lady herself again, had scattered to their usual stations; one only returned with the Baronne's *chapeau*—apparently a tuft of primroses in a lace rosette—assisted her to pin it on her heavy braids, and then she also discreetly departed. The girl out of hearing the Baronne repeated her question:

"What do you mean?" said she. "What old acquaintance did I crush, and how?"

"Me, Richard Plantier, surgeon of the Paris hospitals, your own ex-husband and most obedient servant, madame."

"You?"

From head to foot she scanned this gentleman of these masterful manners—tall, stately, robust; so much at ease in his plain medical garb, and seeming always to hide a smile in the depths of the dark beard, rayed here and there with a thread of grey, that covered the firm chin. One by one, with the tip of her slender finger, she pointed to the silvery hairs.

"Chagrin!" said he calmly.

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She raised her shoulders, smiling lightly.

"But, seriously, Richard, explain; why, I repeat, do you say that I 'crushed' you?"

He pushed the chair in which she sat towards one of the little tables.

"You will take something, of course; a bad habit, yes; but a plate of cream *pistache?* You were always so fond of *pistache*, I remember."

"Always. Still—take one with me, and have sandwiches instead, brought for two."

Brief as the time had been, the *salle* had begun to fill again. They were no longer alone. Curious glances were beginning to turn towards the corner where this handsome couple sat so unconcernedly.

"Well, the fact is, Armande," said the doctor, at last responding to her question, "I said it because it is true. You did crush me, upset me, stamped and trampled on me—your horses did, at least!" And he gingerly passed his hand up and down his left elbow.

"You are hurt—you are suffering, then?" with anxious contrition.

"Nothing serious. Contused, abraded, as I say, by your horses' hoofs. Luckily for me, your coachman was more adroit than he looked—your footman, too. To restore me to life, he conscientiously sought to drown me. I gave him one hundred sous; enough I suppose?"

She regarded him with amusement.

"The same mania always, I see," said she; "thrusting absurd questions into a serious conversation."

Assisted her to pin it on.

"A habit of trade. I pass my life questioning, catechising, drawing people out——"

"I know," she said seriously; "and, *apropos* of trade, doctor, what a success you have made of it! I never pick up a paper nowadays, but it's Plantier, Plantier here, there, and yonder; hospitals, clinics, memorials, treatises. Your doors besieged by all the world—*grandes dames* and charwomen! Richard Plantier, celebrated surgeon, doctor *à la mode!*"

"At your service, madame. You were the same—a woman *à la mode*; for no sooner did I pick up a paper than I saw your name here, there, and yonder—'the beautiful Baronne le Rozier!' some mention, some compliment, some racy *bon mot*! But lately—for how many months?—two years at least—Paris has neither heard the charm of your voice, nor been refreshed by the beauty of your face. You have been away?"

"Yes."

And as the Baronne said it she demurely glanced at her somewhat sombre dress. Then, with a mischievous lift of eyebrow which the man of medicine remembered, but did not interpret, she laughed and kept quiet. The doctor spoke again:

"Ah, by-the-way, all the world, as you say, does come to consult me; then, why do not you, Armande?"

"I, Richard? I do not need a consultation. I am in perfect health."

"Precisely; too perfect! Pretty soon, *ma belle*, you are going to be fat. I warn you; and it won't improve you either."

"You think so?" demanded she uneasily. "What must I do?"

"You would have me tell you here? A public consultation?"

He rose as he spoke to salute a lady who entered—a slender, willowy, blonde. She stopped at the counter to nibble an *éclair*, and more comfortably scan the Baronne.

"Who is she?"

"A case of mine—anæmia. My duty is to make her fat."

"And to me, to make me thin. You will come to my house to treat me then, Richard?"

"Your—house?" repeated he indecisively. "But he—how would he receive me there?"

"Hum—m!" she smiled, raised her brows, sighed a little.

"He was jealous from the start," she said.

"Ah, I see," said the doctor, "and comprehend it, too," he added gallantly.

Mdme. de Rozier regarded him uneasily. His handsome face remained impassable. Seized with the desire for confidence, however, the Baronne resumed:

"Very jealous, you know, but—with discretion."

"It was for this—discretion—you took him, then?"

"For that and—something else. He was—not like you."

"But I—it was the fault you found with me, you said—I, also, was jealous."

"In your way, my poor Richard. You raged like a tiger, and—let things go. He was born wiser than you."

"He follows you?"

"Perhaps."

"But you are not the woman to be trailed thus, Armande. Formerly, you were adroit enough."

"My faith, yes, and should be still—for something that I truly desired."

"Well, then, there's no help for it; you must come

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to me. I guarantee to reduce your weight fully a dozen pounds."

She hesitated.

"All the world is there in your office," said she.

"But why my office? With the key of the little side-gate—you remember it?"

"To the garden? yes, go on."

"You would be able to find your way directly to your own little boudoir—at present, my study. But what could I do? The patients filled all the *salons* and left me nothing. You shall see for yourself, though, Armande, when you come, if it interests you."

"Certainly it interests me," she smiled brilliantly. "But your fee, doctor, for a consultation?"

"A simple thanks from your beautiful lips."

"How generous! Then you are no longer a miser, Richard?"

"How providential! And you—no longer a spendthrift, Armande?"

They broke into laughter, light-hearted, merry; truly the thing was very droll, ex-husband and wife face to face for the first time in four long years, and recalling, as if it were yesterday, the bickering of other days.

Suddenly the doctor struck his hand to his brow.

"What am I thinking of? Your plate is empty. Some cake, wine, some more cream, Armande?"

"Thanks, no more; my appetite is gone."

"Some bonbons, then. You doted upon them once, I know. Wait one moment. I'll have them done up in a package for you."

And guiding the waitress, box in hand, he went along from case to case, and then, while the girl delayed at the counter to tie up the heap with a silver cord, he returned triumphantly to the Baronne's side.

"The key, Armande," said he, very paternally, "is down in the bottom of the box."

Five minutes later the Baronne de Rozier, with more polite bows and courteous phrases, passed towards her carriage for a "spin" in the Bois.

On the threshold of the shop the Baronne stopped, turned, and held out her hand.

"Ah, doctor! my bonbons, please."

And again came that mysterious lift of the eyebrow, and again he failed to interpret it.

"The Baron," she replied, "has been dead two years."

The Baronne, at home, ate all her bonbons before she rescued the tiny key from the bottom of the box. Then she held it up, and with a smile of a woman of the world discovering some new *divertissement*, exclaimed softly:

"Ah, little key, you are wholly unnecessary; but—you are very amusing."

And after she had mused a moment she went on to herself, still very, very softly:

"And to think he never heard about the—the poor, dear Baron. It is really very amusing." Another smiling pause. "I wonder if the Baron will be jealous? But really I must not try to solve that puzzle; I never was competent to explore the supernatural."

That night, when she went to sleep, the little key was hidden beneath the lace on her bosom. Before she forgot it all, she murmured:

"And to think—he never heard about the—the poor Baron. It is really very amusing." And she added, more slowly, before her eyes closed: "Richard is handsomer than ever, and I always did care for him, even on the day of the decree."

The next evening the Baronne's *coupé* stopped near the little side gate. She turned the key that had been hidden in the box and went in. It was really quite exciting. Richard met her in the garden and gravely walked with her to the decorated room that had once been her own special boudoir.

"I—I am almost sorry after all," he said. "It would never do were it not that a consultation in any other form might—might make him jealous."

"Precisely," she said gravely.

Later, when in the midst of his scientific talk, she reached her arms about his neck and kissed him, he drew back with as near discomposure as he was capable of, and exclaimed:

"But—but the Baron!"

"The Baron," she replied, "has been dead two years."

Then she kissed him again.

Extract from *La Mode*:

"A Surprise.

"The Baronne De Rozier, widow, marries her ex-husband."

Jean du Maure.

AFRA

A Tale of Ancient Rome.

I.

The slaves of Lucius Menenius were enjoying their leisure with greater freedom than usual. They had the mansion to themselves: Lucius and his son were dining with the quæstor, Camillius; his wife and daughter were still away on their holiday; and even the steward, the only freeman among the servants, was away for the day on business. Not only the two chief slaves—Heliodorus, the head slave of the atrium, and Ninus, the house doctor, but also the slaves of lower rank, were giving themselves up to harmless amusements.

In the household of Lucius Menenius, as in many others of Ancient Rome, there were among the slaves some who were of better birth and higher culture than the rest: men and women who could have taken their places among the citizens with credit to themselves and their surroundings. Heliodorus and Ninus were of this category, as well as two other slaves with whom the reader is about to become acquainted.

Ninus and Heliodorus were reclining on couches in that space known as the peristyle, quietly conversing. They were interrupted by a young man of about twenty years, who came out of the library and passed between them. He said a few words to Heliodorus as he passed, but altogether ignored the presence of Ninus.

The latter smiled sadly. He knew that Geticus, who acted as assistant librarian, had taken a violent dislike to him and was jealous of the esteem in which he was held by master and slaves alike; but his face soon assumed its usual calm appearance and he continued the broken conversation.

Geticus walked through the peristyle and into the garden, evidently in search of someone. He was a handsome, well-formed youth, with animated face and dark, flashing eyes. He walked along the paths with well-kept box-hedges until he espied the object of his search, behind the bushes.

"Afra!" he called softly.

"What is it?" asked a voice.

The branches parted and there appeared the charming figure of a young woman about his own age. The sound of her sweet voice, the pretty smile upon her lips, and the enchanting expression in her eyes, made the young man's heart beat more rapidly than its wont.

"I have sought thee everywhere, like a lost piece of gold," said Geticus in his most winning manner. "Then I bethought me that I should find thee among the flowers. And for whom are those roses?"

"For the master, Lucius Menenius."

"Oh! for the master!" murmured Geticus, with a trace of disappointment in his voice.

"Yes! He will be pleased to see these on his table when he comes home."

"Lucius Menenius is to be envied!" returned the young man. "And, wondrous to say, it is Afra the cold, the icy-hearted, who is so anxious to please! Were it not that Lucius is over fifty, one would say that thou wert in love with him!"

"Nay," said Afra. "But is he not always kind and fatherly towards us?"

"Yes," replied Geticus drily; "particularly towards the young and pretty!"

"Fie on thee!" exclaimed Afra, her face flushing with indignation; "that is a sorry jest. Thou art so accustomed to his kindness that thou hast lost all sense of gratitude. How many masters like him wilt thou find in Rome? Not one, I tell thee."

"He is not so pleasant to me as he appears to be to thee, since thou speakest so hotly in his favour," said Geticus with a bow of mock humility. "I know not why I should go about singing his praises at such times as he is too busy to order me to be whipped."

"It is thine own fault. Even a father punishes his child when that child abuses his kindness as thou dost that of Lucius Menenius."

"Who says that?"

"The master himself. Only the other day I heard him tell Ninus——"

A fierce exclamation broke from the lips of Geticus, and a look of intense hatred distorted his handsome countenance.

"Thou art getting angry!" said Afra, shrinking away. "I am sorry that I have wounded thee. I must go."

"Stay!" said Geticus abruptly. "There is time enough for thy roses."

"I will stay if thou wilt calm thyself. How thou rollest thine eyes! Menenius did well to keep thee under lock and key for three days! Had not Ninus said a good word for thee, thou hadst still been in thy room! And thou mayest thank the gods that thou didst not kill the gardener; the stone chipped the bark off the tree—that is a witness to thy rage!"

"He angered me—would that I had killed him!" exclaimed Geticus, his anger rising again.

"I will hear no more!" said the indignant girl. "A fine reason, truly, for killing a man! Dost thou not believe in Jupiter and his vengeance?"

"Bah! I believe, but I know that forgiveness can be bought! The Egyptian priest, Seleucius, hath told me that the killing of an enemy is one of the sins for which

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pardon can be purchased. There is but one sin for which there is no forgiveness—the breaking of an oath! He who breaks his vow suffers the full penalty at the hands of Jupiter!"

"And thou believest that?" asked the maiden scornfully.

"Seleucius says so—ought not *he* to know what is right?"

"How camest thou to visit the Egyptian priest?"

"I will tell thee—in secret," replied Geticus. "I went to him with the young master, Caius."

"Methinks thou art more fond of accompanying Caius in his frivolous pleasure-seeking than of serving thy master honourably. Yet thou knowest how strict is Lucius Menenius!"

"Caius is my master as well as Lucius. Moreover, he hath promised that if I serve him well he will give me my freedom in two years! And then—oh, Afra! Why dost thou make my task so hard? Why dost thou treat me so coldly? Many months have flown since thou didst set my heart on fire with love for thee! Dost thou remember the happy day when together we plucked the figs on the Albanian estate? Thou wert so bewitching that my heart went out to thee, and I vowed that thou shouldst be my bride. And in two years I will claim thee, and thou also shalt be free! Come, give me a kiss in token of betrothal!"

His eyes burning with a fierce, passionate light, Geticus stepped towards her. But she shrank from him.

"I cannot," she murmured, growing pale.

"Thou canst not? What means this?"

"Geticus, it cannot be! Ask me no more, I pray thee!"

He seized her by the arm; his face twitched with passion.

"Thou lovest another!" he cried hoarsely.

"Thou hurtest me, Geticus! Unhand me! Art thou mad?"

"Yes! Mad with love of thee! Tell me all! By Jupiter, I swear that if thou dost not tell me his name now, thou wilt rue this day! I will kill him if I first hear his name from other lips than thine!"

Afra hesitated; the little colour left in her face died away, and she trembled with fear.

"If thou wilt swear not to harm him—swear it by the god Jupiter—I will tell thee," she said, after a pause.

Geticus was consumed with jealousy, and forgot the full significance of what he was doing. He took the oath and waited for her reply.

Afra buried her face in the roses.

"Ninus!" she said in a low voice.

A shrill laugh broke from the lips of the young man.

"Ninus!" he repeated contemptuously. "The Greek from Asia Minor! Half a barbarian! Lucius Menenius bought him only three months ago, and thou hast already thrown thyself at his feet! With his pretended learning he hath contrived to wheedle himself into favour with Lucius, and he hath turned thy head! Ho, ho! a man fifteen years thy senior, with a heavy face that can show no sign of love! Ninus——"

"Cease, cease!" commanded the girl, stung to the quick. "What care I if he be old or young; if his face show love or not? I know him to be noble, good, and kind. His 'pretended learning,' as thou callest it, hath enabled him to restore to health the wife of Lucius Menenius when other physicians had failed, and he hath thus saved Menenius himself from life-long despair. For this, Ninus will soon receive his freedom, and in addition, the rights of citizenship. What sayest thou to that? Go! Thou shalt never speak to me again until thou cravest his pardon."

And with a haughty look the girl walked away.

Geticus watched her until she had disappeared. Then he shook his clenched fist in the direction she had taken.

"Curse him!" he hissed. "She shall never wed him while I have breath—no, not if I have to kill him to prevent it!"

II.

AFTER his talk with Afra, when he had given expression to the feelings he had held in restraint for so long, and had been so bitterly disappointed, Geticus was animated by one all-absorbing thought. How could he thwart Afra's plans—how could he prevent this marriage? He was determined that Ninus should not have her; the bare idea filled him with ungovernable rage, and his hatred of the house doctor became so intense that it appeared a mere trifle to kill him. It would be no more sin to kill such a hypocrite than it would be to throw poisoned bread or meat to the rats in the cellar. All day long, all the next day, he revolved in his mind various plans for getting rid of his hated rival, and finally decided upon poisoning him.

Full of his deadly intention, he was thinking of the best way to administer the poison, when there flashed across his mind for the first time the remembrance of the oath he had taken! He had sworn not to injure Ninus—sworn it by Jupiter—and there would be no peace for him either in time or eternity if he broke that oath! Oh! fool that he had been to act so hastily. Ninus would marry Afra, and he could not prevent it. He fancied he saw it all, how they would both receive their freedom, and be loaded with presents by Lucius Menenius and his wife, in gratitude for what Ninus had done; how they would have the wedding feast in the xystus, Menenius and all the family, as well as the servants, partaking of it; how Ninus would afterwards carry off his beautiful bride. No! Never, *never!*

Only one other solution of the difficulty could he think of, but that he dismissed at once. It was to kill Afra and commit suicide.

So he tossed about all night in mental agony. The following morning the librarian gave him orders to carefully roll up the recent numbers of the *Acta Diurna*, and put them away in order of date. The *Acta Diurna* was the official newspaper of the city and the state; it was copied chiefly by slaves, and contained official news and notices, besides notes of news from all parts of the empire. As Geticus rolled each one up on the stick, he glanced at some of the items of interest, and, finding that it afforded relief to his aching head and throbbing brain, he continued to read here and there until he almost forgot his trouble.

Suddenly his eye lighted on an item which sent a thrill through him. He read it with flushed cheek and bated breath. The very thing! An expression of wild triumph appeared on his face, and he nearly cried out in his joy. The problem was solved; he could spoil their happiness and yet not break his oath!

He hastened to finish his task; all the numbers were stored away except one, and that one he hid under his tunic. Then he made his way to the dining-room where the chief slaves were partaking of the midday meal. Ninus and Afra were among the number.

Geticus threw a furtive glance at the doctor—a vengeful, triumphant glance which meant: "Wait a

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while and thy happiness will be destroyed!" But even at that moment he could not help noticing how well the lovers hid their feelings from the other slaves.

When the meal was finished he found an opportunity of speaking to Afra unnoticed by any of the others.

"I want a word with thee, Afra. Quite alone. Do not fail me, for thy life is at stake, I swear it by Jupiter! When and where wilt thou meet me?"

Afra looked at him. She saw by the wild look in his eyes that he meant what he said. She hesitated, but finally replied: "In one hour, at the spot where thou sawest me gathering roses."

"Good! Be punctual."

As Geticus passed out of the room he saw Ninus, who, noticing that the young man looked worried, asked in his usual kindly tone what ailed him. But the youth shut his mouth with a defiant air and walked away without a word.

The hour was nearly up when Geticus walked through the xystus on his way to the garden. Only one slave was in the xystus, a young woman with whom he had flirted occasionally. She did not hear him coming, and when he touched her on the shoulder she screamed and dropped her brush.

"Thou mightest have killed me with fright!" she exclaimed, turning red. "Why comest thou here?"

"Dost thou think that I come to make a declaration of love?" he asked with the least trace of a sneer. He scarcely knew why he made the remark, but he soon repented it.

"No, indeed!" replied the girl bitterly. "We all know that thou art consumed with love for Afra!" And she hurried away to hide her tears.

"Curse them all!" hissed Geticus. "They all know of my love for Afra. But I will have her yet! She must yield when she knows what I have planned to do, and I care not whether her heart is mine or not, so that I win her!"

They reached the appointed spot almost at the same time.

"Thou must hasten with thy communication," said Afra quietly. "I have but little time."

"A few minutes will suffice," returned Geticus. "Afra, thou shalt not marry Ninus! If thou dost not break off this match of thine own free will——"

"It is to tell me this thing that thou hast brought me here?"

"Yes! Listen to what I am about to read out of the *Acta Diurna*, and thou wilt understand why I said that thy life was at stake! Listen:

> 'It is generally known that Tullius Corvinus was murdered by one of his slaves at his country seat at Alsium a few days ago. Yesterday, in accordance with the old law, which has only been put into operation twice during the present century, all the slaves who were in the place at the time of the murder—seven—were put to death. Attacks of this kind are becoming more frequent, so the ancient law will be acted upon in every instance in future.'"

"What is the meaning of all that?" asked Afra indifferently.

"Think it out for thyself."

"I am unaccustomed to such mental exercises," said the girl impatiently

"Then I will make it clear to thee! Thou shalt never wed Ninus. I have sworn by Jupiter not to lay a hand upon him, so I cannot prevent it in the way I desire! I have not the courage to kill thee, as thou deservest. This, then, is what I will do if thou dost not at once—at once, dost thou hear?—if thou dost not give up Ninus and promise to be mine!"

He had seized her by the wrist, and she turned pale and shrank back as he drew a long dagger from under his tunic.

"Fear not!" he exclaimed. "I have not the courage to hurt thee. Afra, oh! Afra, why dost thou torture me thus? Give me but a word—one little word—of hope!"

"Geticus," she said softly, gaining courage, "can I answer for my heart? If thou didst but know Ninus as I know him——"

He stopped her with a gesture of impatience.

"Listen! Thou seest this blade? It is good Syrian steel.—I verily believe it would cut through iron! If thou wilt not give up Ninus and promise to be mine, I will plunge this blade up to the hilt in the heart of Lucius Menenius! Dost thou understand what that means for thee and thy barbarian lover? Ha! ha! A fine end truly—the headsman's axe!"

"Thou monster!" gasped Afra. "It is thus that thou thinkest to rob me of my happiness! Dost thou think that I would wed one so vile as thou? Dost thou imagine that thou canst frighten me thus into doing what thou desirest? Never!"

"Think of the headsman's axe! Think of the innocent who will suffer by thy obstinacy."

"I do think of them, and I curse thee for thy wickedness!" cried Afra in despair. "But thou shalt not do it; I will scream for help!"

She sprang upon him and seized the hand that held the knife.

"Help, help!" she screamed at the top of her voice as with almost superhuman strength she grappled with him, and tried to force him to drop the dagger.

"Fool!" hissed Geticus, as he struggled vainly to free himself. "So that is thine answer! Then the consequences be upon thy head!"

"Help, help!" screamed Afra again, as they struggled fiercely about the path, the one trying to free his hand, the other endeavouring to gain possession of the weapon.

"What means this?" said an earnest voice near them. And Lucius Menenius, a look of amazement on his face, hurried towards them.

"Take care, my lord," cried Afra warningly, as she felt her strength giving way. "Geticus threatens thee with death! My lord, take care!"

Ere Lucius Menenius had time to comprehend the meaning of the struggle and Afra's warning, Geticus had freed himself from the girl's grasp and had thrown her to the ground.

"It is thy doing!" he raved, with a last look at Afra, and the next instant he had thrown himself with all his strength upon Lucius Menenius, and had plunged the dagger deep into his breast, himself receiving at the same moment a severe wound in the head from the iron stylus, which his master had raised in self-defence.

Menenius staggered a few steps, and then fell heavily upon the path, while Geticus, forgetting his original plan, rushed off, leaving the Syrian dagger in the breast of the murdered man.

III.

WHEN Afra roused herself and scrambled to her feet, she saw that Menenius was still breathing and was moving his arm as though to lift himself up. She flew past him towards the house, and shrieked aloud for help.

The old steward was the first to appear in answer to

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her cries; he was quickly followed by Ninus, whose skill at such a time was most necessary. Afra could not speak coherently; she beckoned to them to follow her, and led them to where their master lay.

"Geticus—attacked him. Oh! the monster!" was all she could say. She knelt by the side of Menenius, and cried to him to say one word.

"Good child!" murmured the dying man.

Ninus knelt by the side of Menenius and gently drew the knife from the wounded man's breast. He saw that there was no hope of saving Menenius; the wound was fatal.

Gently pushing aside Afra and the other slaves who had hurried to the spot, full of horror and grief, Ninus and Heliodorus, with the assistance of two of the male slaves, carried Menenius into the house and placed him upon the bed in his own room.

The old steward had gone off in search of Caius, so he said. But he had another object in leaving the house; he intended to fetch the guard. As a freeman, he had nothing to fear from the law, and was naturally more inclined to look at things from the master's point of view. Who knew that Geticus had attacked his master? Might not Afra's grief be mere pretence? He was not well disposed towards her, because she had perceived that he had a sneaking regard for her, and had laughed at him. He bore Ninus no goodwill, either; he was Latin to the backbone, and Ninus was Greek, and he was jealous of the favour with which Menenius looked upon the doctor. So he went for the soldiers.

In the meantime Ninus, quite unconscious of the consequences of Menenius's death for himself and his fellow-slaves, was doing his best to staunch the wound, and was rewarded by a whispered word of thanks.

"I am dying!" gasped Menenius after a pause. "I feel it! Oh, how did I wrong Geticus that he should——? My poor wife and daughter! Caius! Where is he?"

"He will be here soon, my lord. Keep quite still," said Ninus.

"Why hath Geticus done this?" groaned Menenius. "He has caused the death of you all!"

Afra bent down and whispered in his ear. In a few words she had explained all.

"I alone am to blame, my lord, and I will die willingly; but save Ninus! Oh, save Ninus!"

At that moment there was the rattle of arms and the tramp of soldiers in the house. The slaves looked at one another, and Ninus now for the first time realised the truth. He gently drew Afra away from Menenius, and pressed her to his heart.

"Be brave," he said; "thou art spotless, and needest not fear death. We will die together as we had hoped to live together!" and he imprinted a passionate kiss upon her hot lips.

At the sound of the approaching soldiers Lucius made a great effort and raised himself on his elbow. Ninus rushed towards him, put his arm around him, and tried to make him lie down again.

"No!" cried Menenius. "I will save you—and the others. Listen! They are coming to take you away. Give me your hand, Ninus. Afra, pray that the Gods may give me a few moment's grace."

The cries of the slaves, who were seized by the soldiers wherever they were found, resounded through the place.

"Bid the centurion come here," said Menenius, his voice apparently stronger than before.

Two minutes later the officer entered the room.

"Most noble Menenius," he said, bowing low, "I come in the name of Cæsar and the law. Art thou able to answer two or three questions?"

"Aye! And I can give thee some information which will render thy presence unnecessary. There is some misunderstanding here. No crime has been committed against me. It was an accident. Caius, my son, come here. Listen to what I say, and see that thy father's dying wishes are carried out. Centurion, thou seest that I have but a short time to live, and thou wilt not doubt the truth of my words. The blow dealt by the madman Geticus was not intended for me; it was for Ninus, the surgeon. Geticus wished to destroy his happiness, but the blow fell upon me. Dost hear, centurion? The blow was for Ninus, and the law takes no action!"

A dead silence followed this statement. Afra and Ninus both cast thankful glances at Menenius, who made another effort, and continued:

"Caius, it is my wish that Ninus and Afra receive their freedom. Swear to me that thou wilt give it to them!"

"Father, oh! father, I swear it!" cried the grief-stricken Caius.

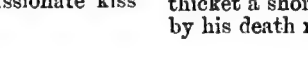
"It is well! Go, centurion, and liberate the slaves, that they may breathe freely again ere I pass away!" gasped Menenius.

The centurion wished to put a question, but Menenius waved him away with a last expiring effort. A few seconds afterwards the noble Lucius Menenius breathed his last.

Caius fulfilled his father's wishes: Ninus and Afra received their freedom, and were soon afterwards married. Ninus could not bring himself to conceal the truth from Caius, who was at first astounded; but he soon perceived that the words which his father had uttered with his last breath, although not true in the literal sense, were true in the higher and nobler sense, and he was content.

What became of Geticus nobody knew until some months afterwards, when his body was found in a thicket a short distance from Rome; but how he came by his death remained a mystery.

G. D.



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A RETIRED BURGLAR'S REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE.

"ENTERING one night by a convenient cellar window a comfortable appearing house in a small town in the North," relates a retired burglar, "I found myself in due time in the drawing-room. I was pretty well tired out; I had been at work every night for a week, and hadn't been doing very well, either; I had come to this town to try the benefit of a change. I had only just got here, and I had my tools in my travelling bag with me. When I turned into the drawing-room of this house I saw over in one corner a table with some books and things on it, and alongside of it a very easy-looking high-backed chair. I set my lamp down on this table and my bag on the floor near by, and the chair looked so very comfortable that I thought I'd sit down myself just for a minute.

"The next thing I knew somebody clapped me on the shoulder, and I woke up very suddenly and stood up and saw standing in front of me, holding a lamp in his left hand, and holding out his right hand to me, a good-looking young man of twenty-five or so, who was saying to me in the heartiest sort of fashion:

"'Why, Uncle William, how in the name of goodness did you get in?'

"Now, just think what a fine cue that was!

"'Why,' says I, with the same hearty manner, 'I rung the front door bell for about three-quarters of an hour, I should say, but, maybe, I didn't ring it very loud, for really I hated to wake up anybody at this hour of night, and when nobody came I thought first I'd sit out on the steps till morning, but it was pretty cool out there, and then I found a cellar window that happened to be open, and I got in there just as easy as could be, and I thought I'd just sit here till morning, and I was comfortable enough, too.'

"As I was talking I stood with my back against the table, and put my hands on the edge of it, reaching for my lamp; I got it finally, and dropped it into my ulster pocket. Then I felt easier.

"'Well, we're jolly glad to see you; but we didn't expect you quite so early. I should have been looking out for you later, and then you wouldn't have had any trouble about getting in. The train was a little early, wasn't it?'

"'No-o,' I said, 'no, I don't think so.'

"'Well, you must be tired enough, anyhow,' said the young man, just a-beamin' with good nature, 'and I know you will want to go to bed. Come along. Just let me take your bag;' and he reached for it. But I said: 'Why, no; I can carry it just as well as you can.' I wouldn't have let him feel the heft of that bag for a good deal.

"Well, he started, and I followed him upstairs. He opened the door of a bedroom in the front of the house and stepped in, and I followed.

"'Looks familiar, hey?' says the young man, smiling, as he looked round.

"'Just as pleasant as ever,' says I, and then the young man said he hoped I'd sleep well, and shook hands again and said good-night and went out. Then I took my lamp out of my ulster pocket and set it down again, this time on the chest of drawers. I hadn't much more than set it down when I heard a knock on the door. I went and opened it. It was the young man back again.

"'Want anything?' he said.

"I told him 'not a thing,' and he said good-night again and went away.

"Well, I sat down and kept quiet for a while and looked about a little. It certainly was a very pleasant room, very comfortably and very nicely furnished; and just now the fresh bed-clothes were turned back invitingly. And there was considerable property worth carrying away; two or three silver bottles and a silver-backed brush, and some other knick-knacks, but I didn't touch a thing; I couldn't abuse such hospitality as that.

"The front window in this room opened on the roof of the verandah. After waiting about half an hour I opened this window and looked out. The roof was rather steep, and covered with slate; not the easiest footing in the world, but better than noisy tin. I shortened up the strap to my bag and hung it round my neck, and got out on the roof and sat down and crawled along slowly, making towards a corner so as to be sure of striking a post. I couldn't help thinking as I slid along that I seemed to be sort o' revolving round that verandah. I had come in by a window under the floor of it, and now I was going out by a window over the roof of it, and when I touched ground again I should have made a complete circuit. But when I had got about half-way down I had something else to think about; I heard a man coming along the road from the direction of the station, walking briskly; Uncle William, sure. He turned into the walk leading up to the house without slackening up a bit, with the air of a man who knew the way perfectly; Uncle William, sure enough.

"He stepped up the steps into the verandah and rang the door bell briskly and quite confident-like, but nobody came. When he'd waited a minute or too, he set his bag down kind o' hard; he was getting a little tired of waiting. Then he rang again. This time I heard somebody coming down the stairs and come up to the door inside and say:

"'Hallo, there!' It was the familiar voice of the young man who had welcomed me half an hour before.

"'Hello, Will,' said the man outside, and I could hear a little scrape on the floor of the verandah as he picked up his bag, expecting to walk straight in. But the door didn't open. Will, named after his uncle, no doubt, was evidently surprised.

"'Why, Uncle William,' he said, 'however did you get out?'

"'Get out!' said Uncle William—he was a little testy now, and beginning to get surprised himself—'I haven't been in yet. What's the matter with you, Will?'

"The nephew opened the door then, and let his uncle in, and shut and locked it behind him. Soon I heard them talking together, both at once; and then they went upstairs together, both very quiet; and it seems a waste o' words to say that then I slid down the post."

B. S. K.

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DEATH ✣ OR ✣ DISHONOUR.

Translated from the French of Sacher-Masoch.

THE battle had been raging for two hours. It was an autumn afternoon, obscured by fog; Poles and Mussulmans had hurled themselves upon one another with furious shock, and now men and horses were hid in clouds of mist and dust and smoke. The shrill neighing of the horses and the thunder of their hoofs mingled with the cries of the combatants, the rattling of the fusillade and the ringing clash of lance and sword.

Vainly the general, stationed on a hill on which he had planted his standard, tried to follow the combat. All that could give him a clue of the state of affairs was the continued flashes of the batteries of guns.

Nothing was to be seen in the whole expanse of the plain but one great red blur, illuminating with its fires the murky heavens, with here and there a riderless horse or a wounded man. The troops had scattered in isolated combats; friends and enemies, Poles, Cossacks, Turks, and Tartars were mingled as if themselves blown about by the tempest wind that sweeps down from the Ural across the Sarmatian plain, and makes the many coloured leaves dance about in a mad saraband.

The fog favoured the resistance of the Poles; without its veil they would have soon seen that they were fighting ten to one. Savage cries of "Allah!" rose now and then above the roar of the guns; arrows fell thick as hail; lances clashed against other lances; yataghans were crossed with other menacing curved blades.

Often the adversaries went at it with their hands, knifing one another with short blows; even the horses bit one another in the fury of combat. Here a trunkless head bounded into the air, and the horse dashed away in the fog, still bearing a decapitated corpse; there, a soldier, pinned to the ground by a lance, clutched desperately at the empty air.

All at once a savage hurrah sounded on the flanks and rear of the Polish army. A horde of Turks burst at a mad gallop from the forest and threw themselves between the Poles and the river. The general did not detect the danger until it was too late. On all sides arose the cry of "Treachery! Treachery!" and each turned to flee for his life, trying to gain the bridge across the river. Before engaging in battle the Staroste Tarnowski had proposed in the council of war not to attack the Turks until they had crossed the river. The fate that the Poles had reserved for the enemy became their own portion by a sudden turn of fortune.

Almost stunned by this brusque reverse, but in nowise losing his courage, the intrepid commander of the cavalry forced his scattered troops to turn back. He threw himself before the flying horsemen, stopping them with gestures and cries, and finally succeeded in rallying some hundreds of fugitives, with whom he hurled himself upon the Turks.

It was in vain. The field pieces of the Poles had already been taken, and all at once an immense fire flamed up behind the conquered army. The camp followers had set fire to the bridge. At sight of this the bravest gave up the struggle, each thought only of saving himself, and those who fell into the hands of the enemy let themselves be massacred without resistance. The general had perished in the *mêlée*, and soon his skin, stretched and dried, covered the head of a drum offered as a trophy to the Sultan.

Thousands of men had been massacred and mangled by the hoofs of horses; thousands of soldiers, made prisoners, were tied to the tails of horses and led away to slavery. Of those who succeeded in gaining the river the greater part were drowned, some, a mere handful—composed for the most part of Cossacks—reached the further bank, thanks to the vigour of their horses, and found themselves for the time being in safety.

Two lance thrusts had wounded the Staroste Tarnowski. Just then a stray bullet struck him, and he sank down upon his horse's neck like a marionette when the string that sustains it is broken. There was nobody to assist him except Godomine, his young Cossack servant. The latter, who had many times given his master proof of his fidelity and devotion, sought once more to save him.

A pasha, in a flowing robe of blood-red velvet bordered in sable, bore down with flapping rein upon the wounded man. With incomparable skill he threw towards the Staroste the nooze of his lasso, which instantly enfolded the neck of the Pole. He was about to choke him, and was already rejoicing in the conquest of so noble a slave, when the Cossack severed the cord with a stroke of his knife, and disappeared with his master into the mists that rolled through the valley.

All at once the Staroste's horse staggered and fell. The Cossack caught his master, threw him across his own saddle, and resumed his wild dash for the river.

They had already reached in their headlong course the edge of the willows that lined the river, when the Staroste signified a desire to leave the horse. He could go no further; he felt that the end was approaching.

The Cossack dismounted, took his well-beloved master in his arms and bore him to the nearest tree; there he unfastened his tunic, and tried to staunch the blood that trickled from his bare chest.

"Do not take so much trouble," said Tarnowski; "God is calling me."

"May His will be done!" murmured the Cossack; "but if that is the case, I will accompany you, my master, to Paradise."

"No, no!" said the Staroste with an effort, for his voice was beginning to fail him. "My wife—shall it be her fate to end her days in the seraglio of the Sultan? No, no!"

He took breath, spat out the blood that choked him, and looked long at the Cossack, as if he would read his very soul.

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Two riderless horses passed in their neighbourhood; one of them approached the dying man, neighed wistfully, and then, frightened, galloped away.

"Save yourself," continued the Starоste; "you alone of all my servitors I can trust as I would myself. Hasten home to Horgg; there, with your own hands, strangle my wife—'twere better so than that she become the prey of the Turks, 'twere better than to think that she will belong to another—so, no one shall have her."

Godomine looked at his master in awed astonishment.

"Do you comprehend?"

The Cossack made an affirmative sign with his head.

"You will carry out my command?"

Godomine nodded his head for the second time.

"Swear it to me."

The Cossack raised his hand and took the required oath.

"Good. Now I can die in peace, and you—go, and may God protect you!"

The Staroste fell back, and from his lips came a last orison. Then his eyes turned towards the north, like those of a man who, as he embarks upon a long voyage, casts a look upon his native land.

When the Pole had breathed his last, Godomine leapt into the saddle and urged his horse fiercely across the stream. A troop of Turks, coming up at full gallop, sent after the fleeing man a cloud of arrows; but none of them reached Godomine. He only turned his head disdainfully and spat towards them. When his horse had climbed the opposite bank, the animal, as if sharing his master's sentiment, shook his waving mane and neighed joyfully. The Cossack threw his horse into a gallop, and presently the field of battle and the torrent of fugitives disappeared, lost in the violet shadows.

A sparsely wooded country spread itself out before the Cossack. He made his way over the carpet of velvety green moss that lay beneath the beeches, oaks, and birches, which, growing, at generous intervals, were aligned in long avenues, spreading their great branches in all directions. The tops of these forest giants were so bushy that they hid the sky from sight, and only a few isolated rays of the sun flitted furtively through their foliage.

After having journeyed long under the fluttering leaves in the midst of the thousand noises of the forest, he slackened the pace of his foam-flecked steed. In this solitude the clamour of conflict could no longer be heard; one might almost have thought that there were no men upon the earth. The dry taps of the woodpecker, drilling with its beak the bark of the oak, or the cry of the vulture, alone was heard in that realm of peace.

It was night when Godomine, leaving behind him the wooded country, found himself amid the great marshes and pools of water, in whose calm surface was mirrored the pale light of the stars—little seas and lakes bordered with waving reeds. The intelligent Cossack horse advanced with much caution, now and then sounding with his hoof the treacherous soil. A pale mist rose in light clouds from beneath the earth, and about the horseman began the dance of the false fires of the marsh lights. The Cossack almost thought himself flying, like the Tsarewitch in the story, on the back of a winged wolf across the heavenly vault; above him floated the clouds, and all about twinkled the reflection of the stars.

It was not until the morning, on his arrival at a miserable village, that Godomine resolved to take a little rest. A dog greeted the unknown horseman with savage barking; a young girl in a short garment of sheepskin ran out, barefooted and with unbound hair, bearing upon her shoulders a yoke from which hung two buckets.

The Cossack helped her draw the water, and, in turn, she let him drink, and his horse as well. After that the young girl pastured her goats, and to appease his hunger he plucked and ate the berries that grew everywhere among the hedges. Then Godomine recounted to the frightened peasants all that had happened.

After a little he set out again, traversing fields and pastures, passing by villages and manors, saluted here by the peal of bells and there by the croaking of ravens that dotted the freshly harvested fields. And so he went on, hour after hour, across field and forest, moor and upland, never letting his horse rest an instant except at a spring or at the edge of a corn field.

Day was falling as he reached the sandy steppe on which was situated the estate of Horgg.

Already the chateau, locked in its belt of grey moss-covered walls, rose before him on a gently sloping hill. At the side of a road stood a cross, presenting to the passer-by the image of the dying Saviour. The windows of the castle gleamed in the first rays of the sun, and when Godomine arrived at the court the rooks greeted him from the height of the belfry with a discordant clamour.

The Cossack tied his horse in the court, mounted the narrow servant's stair, passed unnoticed through the ante-room, and heaved a profound sigh as he stopped before the door of the bed-chamber.

When he entered, a sort of rosy twilight flooded the great room. The sunlight came in, tempered by the curtains of the windows and of the bed that stood in the midst of the room, and on the Persian carpet which covered the floor, and on the bearskins of the bed it made shifting golden circles.

On the bed, half-hidden amid its snowy pillows and soft furs, lay a golden-haired woman of marvellous beauty.

The Cossack stopped before her, gazing on her with dumb emotion. One of the great blonde tresses of the Starostin flowed over her breast, uncoiled like a golden serpent guarding an enchanted treasurer; her gracious head, with its crimson half-opened lips, rested upon one of her arms; she breathed tranquilly, regularly, like a sleeping child, and the dazzling ermine on her gown, made of some soft stuff worked with gold, gently rose and fell in the even rhythm of her respiration. He felt pity for this beautiful young creature who slept so free from care, and it seemed to Godomine as if he felt the quickening of some new and unknown feeling, compassion, or love, that had just been born within his breast.

But his oath! he had sworn to make the wife follow her husband into the other world. Should he kill her in her sleep? Could he do it when she had opened her eyes? Ought she to pass away without a prayer?

No. He approached her slowly, nearer still, and pronounced her name aloud.

She sighed deeply and turned on her couch.

"My gracious lady."

She made another movement, and, lying on her back, she slowly opened her blue eyes wider and wider.

Godomine felt his heart beating.

"Oh, it is you," she murmured, and she quickly drew the coverings about her; "what is it? What has happened? Whence come you?"

"From the field of battle, Madame."

"Where is the Staroste, my husband?"

"Dead, Madame, dead; but, God be praised, Madame, he perished like a hero."

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The shocked Starostin stared fixedly at this bearer of evil tidings, but she did not weep.

"Dead," she murmured slowly.

"We lost the day," continued the Cossack, "and the conquering infidels are pursuing us—are at our heels now. You cannot, you must not, Madame, be their prey."

"Well, let us fly," cried the beautiful widow.

"The last wish of my master," continued Godomine, "was for you, and he enjoined me to——"

"To accompany me?"

"No, Madame, no——"

"What, then?"

"To kill you."

The Starostin stared at Godomine with terror; then she set to rubbing her eyes.

"No; I am not dreaming, I am awake. But you—you are mad."

"No, Madame; but I must obey."

"You will never execute such a command."

"I have sworn a sacred oath to the dying Staroste. Pray, Madame, for you are about to die."

"To die!" She drew herself up, and, proudly lifting her beautiful head, she said: "Am I then so powerless? Go, miserable varlet, or I——"

She was about to pull the bell rope to summon help when Godomine swiftly drew the poniard from his belt and severed the cord with a single stroke.

"Pray, before it is too late," said the Cossack slowly.

"But I do not wish to die," she moaned.

"Pray!"

"I do not wish to."

"Then may God pardon me."

And Godomine took in his arms the beautiful widow, who shuddered through all her body and menaced him with her eyes; in the right hand of the servitor the steel of the poniard gleamed ominously.

"Pity!" cried the Starostin.

"Pardon me what I have said in this mortal panic," she continued; "I was mad! You are not cruel, your heart is good, you will have pity on me!"

"Pray!"

"My God! Must such a command be executed?"

She began to weep and pray. A burning tear fell upon the bronzed hand of the Cossack. He shivered, and released his victim.

"Take all that I possess," said the Starostin suddenly. "Take this necklace——"

"You are very generous, Madame," responded Godomine, "but I will not betray my master."

"What do you wish then?" stammered the Starostin. "You wish my blood? Why? Rather take me living—take me, I belong to you—save me——"

"Fear God, Madame!" cried the startled peasant.

She threw herself upon Godomine's neck, making of her arms a lasso like that which the Tartars throw in battle, the noose of which paralyses its victims and makes of him a slave. Godomine fell on his knees and hid his face in the soft, white billows of the fur that fell about the Starostin's form.

"You are so strong, so handsome!" she murmured. "Do you not care for me?" She laughed softly. "Oh, I knew it, too—deny it if you dare."

Slowly she drew to her the Cossack's face, and kissed him full upon the lips.

"Have pity on me!" murmured the unhappy man. For all response the Starostin pressed him more closely to her, and covered his face with fiery kisses.

"Unloose me, Madame!" cried Godomine, "let me go! I have not the blood of Judas in my veins!"

"Life is just beginning for us," continued the snarer; "for us the future is all rose colour—for the dead, ashes and silence. Is it not good to live and love?"

"Pity!" cried the Starostin.

Again she sought to draw the Cossack towards her. But her very abandon finally capped the climax of Godomine's indignation, and gave him back his strength.

"Unloose me, woman!" he cried. "Demon, tempt me no further!"

And winding her golden tresses about his hand, he thrust his poniard into the Starostin's heart. She gave one cry, a convulsive tremor shook her beautiful form, and, with a rattle in the throat, she sank down dead.

The Cossack knelt down and prayed in silence.

When he had made the sign of the cross he arose. The oath to his master was accomplished, his wife was dead. Ah, but she was beautiful, even in death, stretched upon the billows of blood-dyed ermine and half covered by her heavy golden locks!

The Cossack made upon her the sign of the cross. Then he left the chamber of death, hastened down the narrow stair, and leapt into his saddle, with a cry to those who gathered about him: "Our master is dead! The infidels are upon us! Save yourselves who can!"

Indescribable confusion followed this announcement.

But the Cossack had passed the portals and was off at a mad gallop across fields and prairies, ditches and streams, his horse clearing all obstacles with mighty leaps. To see his wild career, one might have thought that the dead beauty rode behind him on the horse, lashing both horse and rider with her golden tresses.

Arrived on the steppes, surrounded by a green undulating sea of flower-dotted grasses on whose slender fronds the sunlight danced, the Cossack curbed his smoking horse to a walk.

Then he cast a profound sigh, and, lifting his head, gazed long into the face of the heavens, like one who, fearless of reproach, looks straight into the eyes of God.

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CONRAD'S ✣ LOVE ✣ STORY.

ON a summer evening, some ten years ago, a group of men sat round a table in the Café Louret, in the French quarters of New Orleans, sipping light wines and black coffee. They were a merry party, and a good story was told or a song sung between every round of drinks. The jolliest jester of them all was Jules Fougere, a young swell who sometimes painted, when luck was against him at the lottery, and who always had on hand a score of love affairs with pretty Creole women. He had just finished describing the dark hair and the dreamy black eyes of his newest lady love, when Paul Conrad, an artist, entered the café. Every man at the table knew Conrad well, and they called to him to join them.

"A story, Paul, a story!" cried one of the party, as Conrad said:

"Jules Fougere! You here? Pardon, I did not see you before, but, believe me, I am glad you are present. Yes, I will tell you a story, and it will be true."

Conrad addressed Fougere, and there was a peculiar emphasis to his words, but it was unnoticed, except by the man for whom they and their hidden meaning were intended. The Bohemian painter turned a trifle pale and emptied his wine glass at a gulp.

"I sold my last picture this morning," Conrad began, as he sipped the black coffee he had ordered, "and on my way home I planned a surprise for my wife. Some of you know my wife—my Juliet. You know how beautiful she is; you have seen her dark, dreamy eyes, but ah! you cannot know my love for her. Her voice is music to my soul! the light of her eyes guides my brush! my love for her is the inspiration of my life!

"In the jeweller's window I saw a beautiful necklace. The diamonds gleamed brighter than stars, and I said to myself: 'I will buy it for Juliet. It will make the love light shine in her eyes till the gems look pale. Yes, the diamond necklace shall be my present to my wife.' The price was more than half the price of my picture, but money was nothing to me when I thought of Juliet's happiness.

"With light steps and a happy heart I hastened home with the present. I hurried to Juliet's room and opened the door softly. Ah, the story does not interest you, my dear Fougere! Too many love affairs of your own to think of another man's love! But be patient to the end, and I promise the story shall interest you more than you think."

"I am deeply interested, Paul. Go on!"

Fougere grew a trifle paler, and others besides Conrad this time noticed that his hand trembled slightly as he raised his wineglass to his lips.

"I entered Juliet's room," Conrad went on, "but she did not meet me with open arms as was her custom. I glanced about the room. She was not there. Then the plan to surprise her with the pretty present came to mind. I would conceal it in the drawer of her dressing-case. She would find it when it was time to dress for dinner, and I would be there to see the glad sparkle in her eyes, to hear her exclamations of startled delight. Yes, I would surprise her, then she would prize the gift all the more.

"I hastened to the dressing-case, fearful she would return before I could hide the package. I opened the drawer, and there I found, not the dainty handkerchiefs of Juliet, but a picture, a photograph. Beneath the picture there was a letter, a letter to Juliet, my wife. I picked it up carefully, as one would touch a viper. I read it, words of love, words of passion, all addressed to her, to the woman I loved better than life. I saw the name; it was that of the man whose photograph I had found there with the letter.

"Ah, my dear Fougere, I see you are growing interested in my story!

"I put the letter back. Then I thought of the diamond necklace, the present I had bought for Juliet, the wife I loved. I threw it on the floor, I stamped on it; the glitter of the diamonds seemed to mock me; they were like serpents' eyes, and a serpent had entered my house. I took up the picture again. My brain was burning, but I wanted to look at that face once more, so I could not forget it.

"Then Juliet entered the room. At a glance she saw what I had discovered, and, falling on her knees at my feet, she confessed all and begged me to forgive. My love was dead, but there was no forgiveness in my heart. I looked down at the broken necklace; the gleaming diamonds were watching me, they seemed to laugh at my misery, and the pictured face of Juliet's lover smiled at me.

"I drew my dagger, and as she knelt there at my feet, I plunged it into the heart of Juliet, my wife, who was false to me!

"You start and grow pale, my dear Fougere! Does my story interest you so much? Stay, do not leave yet, the story is not finished.

"I ran from the house, leaving her dead there on the floor. Her blood stained the diamonds of the broken necklace. The picture and the dagger I brought with me. I have them now! See, here is the picture! 'Tis the handsome face of Jules Fougere! And here is the dagger! See the stain of blood on the blade there, and there! It is the blood of Juliet, my wife! The blade pierced her heart as it now pierces yours, Jules Fougere!"

With a lightning-like movement Conrad sprang forward and plunged the long blade of the dagger into the heart of his wife's lover, then turning to the horrified men round the table, he said quietly:

"Gentlemen, kindly call the police; I wish to give myself up!"

E. GARNET.

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Detective and Prisoner.

Two men sat together in the rear seat of a smoking-car on one of the American railways, and chatted familiarly of the ups and downs of a miner's life, the topic being suggested by a landscape dotted with coal breakers and furrowed with coal roads. The freedom and interest of their conversation did not seem to be dampened by the fact that the younger of the two carried a revolver, while his companion wore a pair of those uncoveted articles of jewellery which are known in criminal circles as "bracelets."

The few passengers who had observed them learnt from the confidential coloured porter that they were a noted detective and his prisoner on the way to trial.

As far as ages went the pair might have been taken for father and son, the fine grey head of the one contrasting strongly with the crisp brown curls of his captor.

What crime had been committed the porter did not know, but hazarded a conjecture that it must have been a pretty bad one or George Munsen wouldn't have took the trouble to put them things on his wrists. Presently the porter and the conductor satisfied the joint demands of etiquette and curiosity by stopping to exchange a few words with the detective; the former then perched himself upon the coal-box directly behind the prisoner, and the latter dropped magnificently into the seat in front. The train was sweeping round a curve and past a broken trestle on the hillside, at which both of the passengers looked with some interest.

"I remember that place," said the older man.

"So do I," responded the younger. "I was born there. Came near being buried there, too," he resumed, after a moment's pause.

"How was that?"

"It's a long story," said the detective, "but I guess we'll have time for it between this and the next station. Away up there on the slope is the little settlement where I made my *début*, so to speak; from it to the bottom of the hill there used to be a gravity road—a long winding track, reaching from the settlement down to the top of a blank wall of earth, where a slide occurred the year I was born. On both sides of the track grew saplings that had sprung up since the disaster (what I am telling you happened five years later), and they crowded the road, and hung over the old rusty rails on which the coal cars used to run.

"You must remember that the houses were built near the mouth of the pit—that was one of the first mines worked in this country and one of the first to be abandoned. The time I am telling you about some men were walking up the track, and a lot of children playing near the top, climbing in and out of an old car which had lain there since it made its last trip, with the broken spraggs still in its wheels. The men were miners, all but one of them, who questioned his companions about their work and the country they lived in. He was evidently a stranger—probably a newspaper man.

"Presently, as they talked, a shout from the top of the slope attracted their attention, and they looked up just in time to see the car begin to move slowly down the grade. There was an impatient exclamation from the oldest man in the party. 'Them brats is always up to some mischief,' he said. 'They have started that old thing off at last. I've been expecting to see it go, any time this five year. They'll be breaking their necks yet with their tomfooling.'

"And another of the group added: 'We must dust out of this lively, unless we want to get our own necks broke: she'll either jump the rail or go to pieces at the bottom; lucky there ain't no one on board of her.' The stranger was looking anxiously up at the approaching runaway. His quick eye caught sight of something round and golden above the black rim.

"'There's a child in that car,' he said quietly.

"It was a second or two before his companions realised the awful meaning of that statement. 'A child! That was as if he had said that in a few minutes someone—perhaps one of themselves—would be childless. With one impulse they turned to look at the broken rails by the edge of the fault. Shuddering, they fixed their eyes again on the approaching mass, then hopelessly on each other. They could not dream of stopping the progress of the car. But, quick as thought almost, the stranger took hold of a sapling and bent it down till it nearly touched the track. 'Hold it,' he said to one of the men, 'it will help to check her.'

"A rod further down another, and then a third and fourth were held in the same way. So four of the party waited for a few breathless seconds, while the two remaining ones hurried further down; but one more effort, and the car was upon them. The first obstacle

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was whipped out of the hands of the strong man who held it, and the car rushed on to the second with scarcely lessened force. Again the barrier was brushed aside, but this time the speed of the old wreck was perceptibly less. By the time the fifth obstruction was reached, the new comer was able to clamber aboard and throw the child into the arms of his companion, but before he had time to save himself the old truck had regained something of its momentum, and was plunging on towards the precipice.

"Well, the man jumped just as they reached the edge, just before the vehicle shot over into the air, but he had very little time to choose his ground, and so landed, as luck would have it, on the only heap of stones in sight. The others picked him up for dead, and carried him to the settlement, where the miners held a regular wake over him. But he came to life in the middle of the festiv—the obsequies, I mean—and it was found that he was only crippled for life.

"The miners, folks not easily moved, were enthusiastic about the affair.

"A mass meeting was held, and an orator addressed the crowd from the top of an overturned barrel.

An orator addressed the crowd from the top of an overturned barrel.

"They also gave such testimonials as they could to show their gratitude and appreciation.

"One of these expressions took the form of a souvenir, signed by every man in the place, and stating in very grandiloquent language what the poor fellow had done. His quick wit seemed to them more wonderful than his courage and devotion in a community where neither quality is unusual at all. The man who takes his own life in his hand every day, and has frequently to fight for the life of some companion, values a 'brainy' action. In the box with the testimonial was a purse of fifty dollars and a curious old gold cross, that had been treasured by the mother of the child that was saved, as her piece of finery. On it was rudely engraved these words:

"'Given by the miners at the Notch to the man who risked his life for a child.'

"That was all. The poor fellow went away, and would have been forgotten, only that the old miners told the story sometimes to their children."

The prisoner was looking out of the window. The conductor fussed about as though ashamed of the interest he had shown in the story—a story which he did not doubt was pure fiction. Only the porter gave way to his sympathy, and asked whether the man had ever appeared in those parts again.

"Not that I know of," replied the detective.

"And was you the boy what he saved?"

"I was the kid."

"And you never heard tell what became of the man? What would you do if you should come across him some time?" Evidently the porter had an imagination which was trying to assert itself.

"Oh, I'd try to even the thing up somehow. I suppose common decency would demand that. I'd treat him as well as I knew how."

"Look here," said the prisoner, turning from the window with an apparent effort to change a conversation which, for some reason, had not seemed to interest him, "look here, old man, I've got a little keepsake, that your story just reminded me of, and if I could get at it I'd ask you to take charge of it for me till—till the thing is over. If you'll put your hand in there and pull out that piece of ribbon, so——"

The conductor almost jumped out of his seat.

"Hanged if it ain't the cross that you've just been telling about!" he shouted.

A month later the detective was undergoing a cross-examination by the conductor and porter.

"Yes, he was a bad lot—oh, yes, he didn't have a leg to stand on; the facts were all as clear as day. All true about the cross and the rest of it? Just as true as gospel. What had he been doing? Throwing bombs the last thing. Punished? Well, to tell you the truth, they won't be apt to punish him till they catch him again. Fact is, he got away from me somehow that same night. Who, me? Oh, no. I'm not on the force any more; I've been bounced."

SILAS MACKAY.

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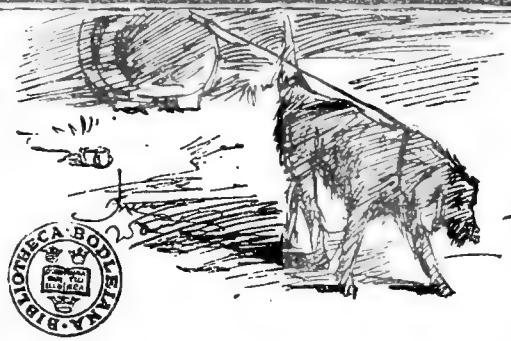
BRISK, THE AVENGER



BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

THE widow of Paolo Saverini lived with her son in a poor little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a spur of the mountain, seeming in places to hang suspended over the sea, faced across a narrow channel, that bristled with jagged rocks, the lower coast of Sardinia.

At its feet, a cut in the cliff, like a gigantic corridor, leading between precipitous walls up almost to the first house, served as a port for the Italian Sardinian fishing boats, and twice a month for the wheezy old steamer from Ajaccio.

On the white mountain side the group of houses made a spot yet more white. They look like the nests of wild birds, clinging to the rocks and looking down upon the terrible passage where few vessels dare venture.

The house of the widow Saverini, set upon the very edge of the cliff, has three windows that look upon the savage and desolate scene. She lived there alone with her son Antoine and their dog Brisk, a big, gaunt brute, with long shaggy hair, which accompanied Antoine on his hunting trips.

One evening, after a dispute, Antoine Saverini was killed with a treacherous knife thrust by Nicolas Ravolati, who fled that night to Sardinia.

When the old mother received the body of her son, which some neighbours brought to her, she did not cry, but remained for a long time staring at it motionless; then, extending her wrinkled hand above the corpse, she pledged to it the vendetta.

She wanted no neighbours to sit up with her, and shut herself up with her dead, keeping with her only the dog, which howled dolefully. Crouched at the foot of the bed, with its head towards its master's body and its tail pressed between its legs, the dog howled long and shrill, while the mother, leaning with fixed gaze over the corpse, wept silent tears.

The old woman began to speak. At the sound of her voice the dog was stilled.

"Go, go in peace. You shall be avenged, my little one, my boy. Sleep, sleep in peace. You shall be avenged, do you hear? Your mother promises it; and your mother always keeps her word, as you well know." And gently she leant forward and pressed her cold lips to the dead face.

Then Brisk began to whine with a monotonous heart-rending terrible sound.

They remained thus, the woman and the dog, until morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried the next day, and soon his name was heard no more in Bonifacio.

He had left neither brothers nor near cousins. No man was there to take up the vendetta. The mother alone thought of it, day and night.

Across the strait she saw, from morning to night, a white spec on the coast. It was a little village, Longosardo, where the Corsican bandits took refuge when hard pressed. They were almost the only inhabitants of the hamlet, and there, in sight of their native land, they awaited the moment when they could return to Corsica. In this village she knew Nicolas Ravolati had hidden himself.

All day long would she sit alone by her window, brooding on her vengeance. How could she accomplish it—alone, infirm, almost at death's door? But she had promised; she had sworn on the dead body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What should she do?

She no longer slept at night, she no longer knew rest nor respite, she thought always, seeking a means. The dog slept at her feet, now and again raising its head to howl mournfully. Since its master was no longer there it often howled thus, as if it would have called him—as if the brute's soul cherished a memory that nothing could efface.

But one night, as Brisk resumed his low howling, the mother had a sudden idea—the idea of a vindictive and ferocious savage. She mused over it till morning; then, rising before dawn, she betook herself to the church. She prayed, prostrate on the stone flags, imploring God to aid her, to sustain her, to give her poor, worn body strength to avenge her son.

Then she returned. She had in her yard an old cask with the head knocked out, which served to catch the rainwater from the eaves. She turned it over, emptied it, secured it to the ground with stakes and stones; then she chained Brisk to it and went indoors again alone.

She walked up and down in her chamber ceaselessly, now gazing always at Sardinia. He was over there, the assassin.

The dog howled all through the day and all that night. In the morning the old woman brought it water in a pan, but nothing more—not a bone, not a crust.

The day passed. Brisk, exhausted, slept. The next day its eyes shone, its hair bristled, and it tugged madly at the chain.

The old woman still gave it nothing to eat. The dog became furious, bayed in a hoarse tone. And so the night passed.

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Then, at break of day, the old woman went to a neighbour and borrowed a truss of straw. She then took some old garments, which her husband had worn, and stuffed them with straw to simulate a human body. Having driven a stake into the ground before Brisk's cask, she tied this mannikin upon it so that it seemed to be standing up. Then she fashioned the head out of a bundle of old cloth.

The dog, surprised, looked at this man of straw and was silent, although devoured with hunger.

Then the old woman went to the butcher's and bought a long string of sausages. Returning to her own house, she lit a fire near the kennel in the yard and broiled the sausages. The dog, famished, bounded about and foamed at the mouth, its eyes fixed on the sausages, the fumes of which drove it almost mad.

Then of these smoking sausages the old woman made a cravat for the man of straw. She fastened it firmly round the neck, as if to make it part of the straw figure. When this was done she unchained the dog.

With a mighty bound the beast seized the mannikin's throat, and, with its paws on its chest, began to rend it to pieces. It fell down, a bit of the prize in its jaws, then jumped again, forced its teeth into the cords, tore away some morsels of food, fell again, and leapt at it again ferociously. It carried away the face in great mouthfuls, rending it into strips with its long sharp teeth.

The old woman mutely watched it all, her eyes blazing. Then she chained up the beast again to his cask, starved it for two days, and recommenced this strange exercise.

For three months she trained it to this sort of struggle, to this repast won only by his fangs. She no longer chained the beast, but with a gesture set it at the mannikin. She finally taught it to tear it, to devour it, even though there was no food concealed in its throat. She presented it with the sausage afterwards as a reward.

As soon as the dog saw the mannikin it trembled, then turned to its mistress, who hissed "Go!" pointing with her finger.

When she judged the time had come, the widow Saverini went to confession one Sunday morning with ecstatic fervour; then, having assumed masculine garb, looking like a ragged old man, she made a bargain with a Sardinian fisherman, who took her, accompanied by her dog, to the other side of the strait.

She had a string of sausages in her bag. Brisk had been starved for two days. The old woman gave the beast a sniff of the fragrant food every now and then to excite it.

They reached Longosardo. She went to a baker's shop and asked to be directed to Nicolas Ravolati. He had resumed his old trade of carpentering, and was at work alone in the back of the shop.

The old woman pushed open the door and called loudly:

"Nicolas!"

He turned; then, loosing her dog, she cried to the trusty brute:

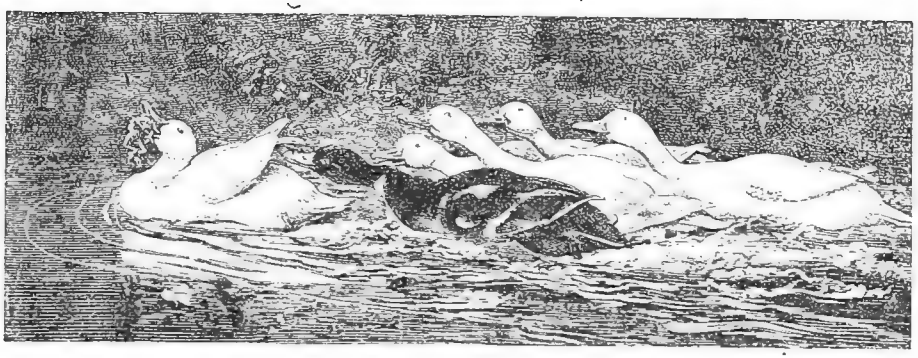
"Go; eat, tear, devour!"

The famished animal sprang and seized the man's throat. The man threw out his arms, seized the dog, and rolled upon the ground. For some seconds he struggled, his feet striking the earth. Then all was still, while Brisk tore his throat to ribbons.

Two neighbours, seated at their door, recall perfectly having seen an old man go out with a half starved dog, which, as it went, ate something which its master gave to it.

At evening the old woman reached her home. She slept well that night.

LE VIER.



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MR. JOHN WYLIE'S LITTLE PLAN.

MR. JOHN WYLIE was bitterly disappointed. He had been in the private inquiry business for over fifteen years, and never before had he experienced such a reverse. It was an affair that had attracted the greatest public interest and attention. A success in it would have established his reputation as a detective officer. But he had failed utterly and ignominiously.

This is how matters stood when he was called in by Sir Henry Heaviside to investigate it. On the 15th of November Sir Henry was away from home. On that night, his wife, Lady Helena, supported by her father, the Marquis of Doltshire, had given a little dinner, which was followed by a reception. Her ladyship had, as usual, been rather slow in dressing, and when the dinner-hour arrived she was greatly pressed for time. In her haste she had neglected to replace her jewels, which she intended to put on after dinner and previous to the reception, in the safe, and contented herself with locking the door of her boudoir and putting the key into a drawer in her bedroom. After dinner she found the key where she had left it, and reopened the door. On entering her boudoir she discovered to her amazement that the window was wide open. A moment's investigation showed her that all the jewels she had left upon her dressing-table when she hurried down to dinner were stolen. Their value was close upon seven thousand pounds.

This was, I repeat, how the matter stood when Mr. John Wylie was called in, and practically it was in the same state when, after six weeks' laborious investigation, he gave up the inquiry in despair. He suspected much, but he discovered nothing. It was clear to him that the robber, whoever he might be, was perfectly familiar with the house and with Lady Helena's careless ways. It was also clear to him that the window found open—which was twenty-five feet from the ground, and which showed no evidence of having been forced—was left open as a ruse to mislead the detectives.

He felt quite sure that the robber had entered the boudoir by means of Lady Helena's key, and that, if he left the house at all, he went out by a side door, which was fastened only by a spring lock. He was inclined, however, to believe that the thief was one of the household, and that the jewels were still in the house. Acting on this belief, he searched the house from top to bottom, examined all the servants' boxes and cupboards, and watched diligently all their movements; but, after six weeks thus employed, he had found nothing to implicate or even throw suspicion on any one in particular. He confessed himself utterly baffled.

As one day seated in his sanctum he was very mournfully turning over in his mind the question of his failure, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he cried out.

The door opened, and the office boy put in his head.

"Lady wants to see you, sir."

"Show her in."

The next moment a tall, stately, thickly-veiled lady was ushered into the detective's private office. Mr. Wylie offered her a seat, which was silently accepted. As soon as the door was shut again, she raised her veil and showed a handome, refined face. Then without much more ado, she introduced herself.

"I am Lady Moodie," she said, "wife of the banker of that name. And I have come here," her ladyship continued, "in very great trouble, to see if you can assist me."

"You may rely upon it, Madam," said the detective, "that I shall use my utmost efforts to do so."

"I will tell you," Lady Moodie went on, without noticing Mr. Wylie's remark, "the whole story as shortly as possible. Owing to my health, I had to winter last year in Florence. My husband's business and parliamentary duties would not permit him to join me. While living there by myself I met an Italian gentleman, with whom I formed rather an intimate friendship. You should know," she added hastily, "that there was nothing improper in it, though there was much that was imprudent."

"I quite believe you," said Mr. Wylie.

Lady Moodie seemed rather irritated than gratified by this assurance.

"Thinking," she continued, after a pause, "that he was an honourable man, I frequently wrote to him, and some of my letters—one or two of them, at any rate—would, I am afraid, bear to a jealous mind a very different meaning from that intended. When I returned home he followed me. By my influence he was received in Society here—not only so, but I assisted him from time to time with money. At last his demands became too extortionate, and I refused them. Then the miserable scoundrel turned upon me, and threatened that if I did not comply with his requests he would give the letters to my husband. He had mistaken his woman," Lady Moodie concluded passionately. "I would rather die than give a penny to the menaces of a coward!"

"May I know the gentleman's name?"

"Count Ulrici."

"Whew! The male professional beauty!"

Mr. Wylie, like everybody else, had heard of the Count. He was considered by all to be the best-looking, best-dressed, and best-mounted man to be seen in Rotten Row. He was reputed to be very rich, too, and it was this revelation as to the means by which he lived that astonished Mr. Wylie.

"I presume," said the detective, after a pause, "that you wish me to get possession of these letters?"

"Precisely," answered Lady Moodie.

Mr. Wylie reflected for some moments in silence, then he said:

"I really don't see how I can get them without committing a burglary."

"Couldn't you be induced to risk that?" asked Lady Moodie eagerly.

The detective started. Evidently her ladyship was not inclined to stick at trifles.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Wylie very deliberately, "burglary is rather a large order."

"I'm willing to pay anything to balk the coward," replied Lady Moodie fiercely.

"That's all right," answered Mr. Wylie; "but money's of little use to a man who's doing ten years."

At his words Lady Moodie's face became downcast. She was disappointed. Mr. Wylie noticed this.

"At any rate," he said to her, "let burglary be the last thing. We may be able to hit on some easier ex-

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pedient. Let me see now." And he reflected a moment. How many of those letters are there?"

"Some forty or fifty."

"Ah, so many? He couldn't, then, carry them about with him. Has he any servants?"

"Just one—a valet—an Italian, like himself."

"Hum. I wonder whether he could be bribed? Most Italians can. If I had a week or two to gain his confidence——"

"Impossible. If five thousand pounds be not given to Ulrici within a week the letters will be in my husband's hands."

"Oh, is that the case?"

"Yes; Sir Charles and I leave for Darklingbourne—that is our place in Doltshire—to-morrow, and the Count says that this day week he'll follow us, and that if on his arrival I don't give him that amount he will at once hand the letters to my husband."

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Mr. Wylie, jumping excitedly to his feet. "By Jupiter, I have him! Excuse me, my lady," he added more calmly, "I think I see a way out of the maze. Do as you intended. Let him follow you to Darklingbourne, and if he presents himself to you there, defy him. You may do so with impunity, for he will have no letters to produce."

During the ensuing week Mr. Wylie kept a strict watch upon all the movements of the Count. He contrived, too, to discover a good deal regarding his past life and his future plans. He picked up an acquaintance with his valet, and from him discovered that his master intended to carry out his threat of going to Darklingbourne. The valet had orders to have his portmanteau ready, packed with everything necessary for a few days' stay from home.

On the evening preceeding the day on which he was to see Lady Moodie at Darklingbourne, Count Ulrici drove to Euston. Mr. Wylie, who had ascertained beforehand the train by which he intended to travel, was there awaiting him. The detective was disguised. He was an adept in that business, and now his own mother would not have known him. He had provided himself with a first-class ticket to Rottenborough, the station nearest to Sir Charles Moodie's seat.

The Count came to the station unaccompanied by his servant. Mr. Wylie noticed that his luggage consisted of a large portmanteau only—no doubt the one that the servant spoke of. It was marked on the side with the Count's initials "R.U." As it was too big to be taken conveniently into the carriage, its owner directed it to be placed in the luggage van.

Having marked well the portmanteau and the van into which it was put, Mr. Wylie took his seat in the train in a compartment not far from the Count's. When the train reached Willesden he got out and went into the refreshment-room. There he remained until the train had begun to move, when he rushed upon the platform too late to get in.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, in affected vexation, "I'm left behind."

"Very sorry, sir," said a porter; "where are you for?"

"Rottenborough. When is the next train due?"

"No other train to-night, sir. You'll have to wait till four to-morrow morning."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Wylie, apparently much put out by the information, "what on earth am I to do? My luggage has gone on."

"Train stops at Harrow, sir. I'll telegraph there and have it sent back by the next train."

"Thank you; I wish you would. If I am to stop in town over-night I must have it."

"Very well, sir. What is your baggage like?"

"It is a large leather portmanteau, and was put into the through van for Rottenborough. They'll be able to distinguish it easily, as it has my initials on it."

"And they are, sir?"

"R. U."

The porter went off to telegraph, and the detective returned to the refreshment-room. There Mr. Wylie remained for some time, apparently absorbed in the consumption of a glass of beer, but really wondering what the result of his stratagem would be. He greatly feared lest the Count might notice his portmanteau being removed from the van, and instead of a message coming that the luggage would be sent back at once, one would arrive directing his arrest. So great was his anxiety on this point that it seemed to him hours before the porter turned up. Then, to his relief, he learnt that the portmanteau had been taken from the van at Harrow, and would be sent back by the next train.

When the next train arrived at Willesden the porter pointed out to him the returned portmanteau. Sure enough, it was Count Ulrici's. Letting it remain where it was, Mr. Wylie jumped into a compartment and proceeded with it to Euston.

At Euston, Mr. Wylie claimed the portmanteau, and boldly putting it on top of a cab, drove to King's Cross Station on the Underground Railway, and there he took a ticket to Charing Cross. Carefully choosing an empty compartment, he contrived during the course of his journey to effect a change in his disguise such that, while no more like himself than ever, he was still a very different looking man from the one who claimed the portmanteau at Willesden. When he arrived at Charing Cross it was quite dark, and there were few people about. Taking the heavy portmanteau in his hand, he carried it himself from the station to his office in Duke Street.

The moment he got safely into his private office he produced a bunch of skeleton keys and set about picking the lock. Succeding in this, he eagerly searched through the articles in the bag for the letters he wanted. To his chagrin, he could discover no trace of them. Over and over again he searched the contents, but each time with the same result. At length he paused in his work, almost fainting with anxiety and disappointment.

"Another failure," he said to himself, "and a worse one than before." As he spoke he continued aimlessly turning over the portmanteau's contents. "What a fop the fellow is!" he exclaimed. "Why, half of his luggage is brushes! And now that I notice it, what strange brushes they are! What heavy backs they have!"

The backs of the brushes certainly looked very thick, and when Mr. Wylie examined them closely he found that they were even thicker than they looked, for the hair in the centre was much shorter than at the sides, and the backs, therefore, must be deeper there. Indeed, they looked so suspicious that the detective at once began to try to see if they did not open in some way or other. He soon discovered that they did. The top scale of polished wood ran in a kind of groove, and was easily moveable. He pulled it back, and there in the middle was a hollow space crushed full of letters. Trembling with excitement, he lifted them out and looked at them. To his delight they were the very ones he was in search of.

There were two cases, each containing two brushes. In the first brush he opened there were sixteen letters from Lady Moodie; in the second there were fifteen. These were all in English. The brushes in the other

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case had also moveable backs, and contained letters, but a glance at the handwriting showed him very plainly that they were not Lady Moodie's.

He glanced rapidly over the letters. Their contents were of the most innocent character, mere commonplace congratulations and inquiries, such as a friend would write to a friend.

"I don't see," said the detective to himself, "why she should be afraid of her husband getting these. But she said there were more than forty of them, and there are only about thirty here. Let me see. By Jove, I have it! She told me there were only a few that were of a doubtful character. It is just those few that he has in his pocket, and I've failed again!"

He sat silent and still for a moment, dazed by this discovery, but he quickly regained his habitual coolness and decision.

"Well," he said, "I may as well see what the other letters are about."

He began rapidly to read them. They were in various handwritings, but most of them in one he somehow or other thought he had seen before. These letters were simply signed with an "H," and were couched in the most affectionate terms.

"I wonder who this 'H' can be?" he said. "She's evidently very much gone on the Count, and no mistake. There's a 'love' or a 'darling' for every other word. Here's an invitation for the 15th; how sweet it is. But here is one in which she has gone farther than the 'H.' It is signed 'Helena.' Now, I wonder who 'Helena' is? Hullo, what's this? A letter from a man, and signed 'Svendeleri'—the old Jewish money lender and receiver of stolen goods. That, at all events, looks suspicious."

He read the letter over carefully. When he had finished it he lay back in his chair and drew a long breath.

"Good Heavens!" he said, when he had recovered his composure, "this is a discovery! Was there ever anything so fortunate? I'm off by the morning train, and our friend will be safely in quod before he has a chance of seeing Sir Charles. But stay, it isn't quite so simple as I thought. I must account for the way I came by this paper, which will be difficult. Beside, I'm not sure it will be evidence against him unless it's found in his possession. Let me see."

He paused and reflected. Then, after a few moments, with a cry of triumph, he set to work replacing the contents of the bag. When everything was in it except the letter from Svendeleri and Lady Moodie's correspondence, he selected about ten of the most innocent of her letters, and, replacing the remainder in the backs of the brushes, locked up the portmanteau. Then he placed Svendeleri's letter in one of Lady Moodie's, put them in his pocket, restored his disguise to what it was when he claimed the Count's luggage, and taking the portmanteau in his hand, left the office. When he reached the Strand he called a cab and drove to Euston. At Euston he asked for the station-master.

"This I find," said the detective to him, "is not my portmanteau, after all. I thought it was at first, as it has my initials on the side and is about the same size, but I find that my key won't go into the lock, so it can't be mine."

"No, sir, it isn't yours," replied the station-master; "it is Count Ulrici's. He's been kicking up an awful row about it. We've had half-a-dozen telegrams from Rottenborough already. I'm glad it's recovered. What about your own, sir?"

"That's the question. You had better telegraph down the line about it. It must have been put out at one of the stations the five o'clock train called at. I'll call and hear what news you have to-morrow. Good-night."

Before four o'clock the next morning Mr. John Wylie was at Euston, not disguised this time, but in his usual costume. He took a ticket by the first train for Rottenborough, where he arrived about eight. After swallowing a hasty breakfast at the hotel in that interesting town, he obtained a cab and drove to Darklingbourne. There he inquired for Sir Charles Moodie. Sir Charles at once saw him.

He informed Sir Charles that he was a detective. He had long, he said, been shadowing a foreigner who was suspected of a great crime, and who, he learnt lately, was about to try to levy blackmail upon Sir Charles by pretending to have letters from Lady Moodie which reflected upon her reputation. He was anxious to have a talk with this gentleman in an unsuspected character, in order to try and obtain some unguarded statements from him. He begged Sir Charles to allow him to represent himself as Sir Charles when the scoundrel came to the house. The baronet seemed very adverse to such a course, but Lady Moodie, who was called in for a consultation, so strongly supported it that at last he was induced to consent.

About midday Count Ulrici arrived. He sent up his card to Lady Moodie, but she refused to see him. Then he asked for Sir Charles. He was at once shown into the library, where the detective was. The Count had never seen Sir Charles, who, involved in business cares, seldom went into gay company with his wife.

The Count at once proceeded to business in the coolest and most impudent manner. He had no diffidence or hesitation about stating what sort of relations he wished Sir Charles to believe had existed between him and Lady Moodie. He said he had letters in her handwriting to prove the truth of his statements.

"Show them to me," said the detective.

The Count handed over the letters. After looking at them for a moment, Mr. Wylie proceeded to read them one by one. When he had finished he paused, and said very coolly:

"I see nothing incriminating in these against Lady Moodie. They are all of the most innocent description. But what is this?" And he held up Svendeleri's letter.

The Count turned deadly pale.

"Can I have made a mistake?" he muttered.

"I am afraid you have," said Mr. Wylie, and he touched a bell.

As he did so the Count sprung madly upon him. There was a moment's fierce struggle, but before the Italian could overcome Mr. Wylie, Sir Charles and a servant rushed into the room and seized him.

"Too late, my hearty," said the detective to the Count. "Look, Sir Charles, these are the letters he received from Lady Moodie; more innocent notes woman never penned. And see what I have discovered among them—a letter from that Jewish scoundrel Svendeleri, offering £2,000 for the Heaviside diamonds, which were stolen about two months ago. There stands the thief!"

"What!" exclaimed the Count, "you're not Sir Charles Moodie?"

"No; I'm John Wylie, private detective, at your service."

"What a fool I was," exclaimed the Count, "not to see how it came about that my luggage went wrong."

N. N.

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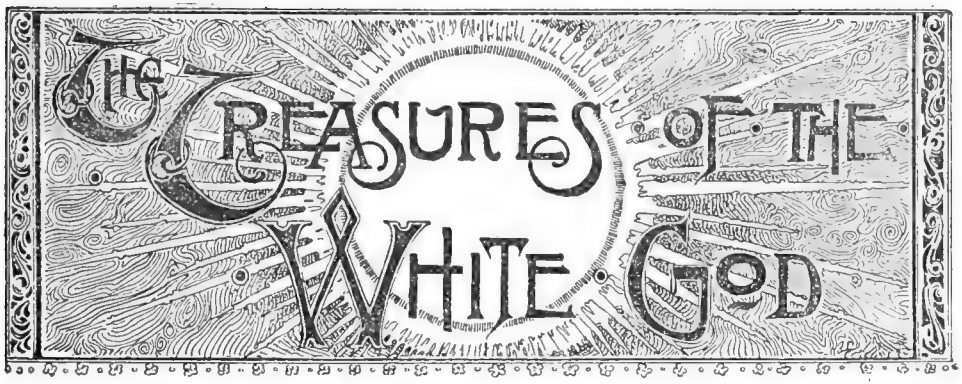

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

SUMMARY.

ROBERT LANE, escaped convict No. 407, *alias* Adrian Burgoyne is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake. Detective Dean finds a cipher in the convict's bed, which he sells to Mr. Richard Sheldon for £2,000. A Col. Lytle calls on Sheldon. They recall Burgoyne's history as follows: Ralph Ringold, when dying in Mexico left a packet containing £6,000 in the hands of Burgoyne for his friend Richard Sheldon, whom he appointed guardian of his daughter Patrice's fortune. Burgoyne overheard Lytle and Sheldon arranging to appropriate the treasure, and threatened to expose them. They caused him to be convicted of a crime, and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

They then discovered, when too late, that he had with him in cipher the secret to Ralf Ringold's hidden fortune and treasures in Mexico.

The cipher is now in their possession, but Patrice Ringold has the key.

Adrian Burgoyne escapes from the burning boat. He meets with a severe accident, which disfigures him beyond identity.

Richard Sheldon visits Patrice to obtain the key to the cipher. This, however, she had dropped the day before on the cliff, with her Bible. She hastens off to find it.

She falls over the cliff, but is rescued by Adrian Burgoyne. Startled by the sudden sight of Col. Lytle, he himself loses his balance and falls. He checks himself, however, and discovers the lost Bible of Patrice. He carelessly throws away the loose cover, and visits Patrice. He tells her of all he has gone through, and shows her a copy of the cipher which fell into Detective Dean's hands tattooed on his arm. He is rewarded by the words of Patrice: "*I adore you!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING!

ONCE in a lifetime Heaven sends some gleam of joy that overshadows all other experiences. To Adrian Burgoyne that rare flitting moment of happiness supreme had come.

"*I adore you!*" The outpouring of a young impetuous soul, free from guile as that of an angel, charmed, fascinated by the wonderful picture of fidelity presented by the hero martyr before her, that utterance was the grateful spontaneous expression of a heart true, tender, and loving beyond compare.

Adrian Burgoyne reeled for joy; he stretched out his eager hand towards Patrice to deter the homage that he felt was due from himself to her—perhaps to pour forth the story of the ardent love with which her beautiful face and the revelation of her true, womanly soul inspired him.

But Patrice had disappeared from the window, coy, abashed at being betrayed into an expression of her vivid emotion; startled slightly, too, Burgoyne adjudged, for the single, quickly uttered, warning-toned word quivered on the air.

"Hasten!"

He turned to leave the spot, with a wild, fierce joy untrammelled, because perfect trust and innocence had spoken, and he knew their deep sincerity; jealously active, for he was ever battling back the haunting thought that he was an ex-convict; that he did not stand on the plain, even basis of ordinary men.

Gliding past a tall lilac bush, he halted. The aroma of fine burning tobacco was borne towards him. Glancing at the front of the house, he saw a glowing point of light—the end of a cigar—and its flare partially revealed its possessor's identity.

"Lytle!" breathed Burgoyne, in an intense tone of voice. "Did he overhear us? Scarcely; but he is coming this way."

Lytle's indolent pose indicated little of the curious or excited lurker. On the contrary, it was evident that he was strolling casually about the garden, that he had just left the house, and that he was entirely unaware and unsuspicious of the absorbing and important interview that had just so strangely taken place at the open window of Patrice Ringold's room.

The lilac lay directly in his path. Its sparse verdure barely sheltered the crouching Burgoyne at a distance. Should he pass directly by it, he could not help noticing the intruder in the garden.

Anticipating and determined to evade a meeting at short range, Burgoyne acted promptly.

He darted from his covert and across the garden beds. Speeding, lithe as a deer, to the fence, he scaled it.

A single glance backward showed Lytle motionless, much in the pose of a surprised animal taken off its guard, peering after the fugitive, and giving utterance to a prolonged suspicious "Ah!"

Had he recognised him, or connected him in any way with the man of the cliffs? Would he suspect that he had been a visitor to the cottage—a surreptitious one?

"Let him think what he likes, he cannot overtake me," murmured Burgoyne recklessly. "Soon I will return; soon Patrice shall be removed, for ever safe from the menace of

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his baleful power. Oh, sweet one! dear one; the very light of Heaven has come into my broken, joyless life!"

He trod on air, he felt equal to a conflict with leagued giants. The past was a dark abyss to forget. The future, golden winged, ecstatic, seemed all illumined with hope and happiness under the glamour and glow of love, sweet love.

She loved him! He could understand how that pure soul, reading his own through eyes untrammelled with earthly taint or selfishness, had passed by his scarred and acid-changed face, and, through the windows of his heart, her eyes had read the true worth of courage and devotion that made him a hero, a lover to cherish in her ardent, impetuous sight.

"The cover to the Bible," soliloquised Burgoyne, as he ran on fleetly. "How strange, how careless, that I should cast aside a treasure, the one important clue to all the Ringold secret! But it is safe—oh! it must be safe. Who would pick it up, or, doing so, would think of exploring its soaked, matted surface, any more than myself? It was near a little school-house, in the playground, that I flung it away. I shall find it there. Then to hasten a return to the cottage. Patrice will be ready, awaiting me. I will convey her to some remote town, as far away from those villains as my means will allow. I will place her in safe, motherly hands. Then a brief adieu, and, inspired by her love, I start out, single-handed but confident, to win the battle of right against wrong, to secure for her the fortune hidden away—the tattooed chronicle, the cipher alphabet key will tell where."

Burgoyne found the little white frame school-house at last, after a vexatious delay, for he was comparatively unfamiliar with the district, and lost time pursuing a wrong road. He crossed the playground as he had done that morning. He ransacked his mind for a clear memory of the abandonment of the Bible cover.

Somewhere, in crossing that broad expanse of lawn, he had cast the precious cover away. Where? He found himself utterly unable to decide upon the exact spot, but he began searching the ground in every direction.

Over it once, over it twice, he crept on hands and knees. No result. He began to tremble. Was the precious secret to elude his grasp? Had some careless school-boy made it a target for a football kick? Could it be possible that it had fallen into hands friendly to his enemies?

"If only I had a lantern," he decided finally, "I could search more systematically. There is a house over beyond the road. I will see if I can secure a light there. An hour lost—more," continued Burgoyne, hastening his steps with vivid concern. "I must return to Patrice. Every moment may be vital, but the Bible cover first. To lose that means beggary for her."

He quickened his pace to a run, planning a rapid return. A swift march over the playground, and a prompt dash for the cottage, and the cover would be found.

Just at the road, however, he came to a halt, with a vivid shock.

It was where a diverging line ran towards the village and past the Loring cottage. Just at his hand he had noticed the glow of a light, and, peering closer, he discerned the outlines of a vehicle, with two pawing, spirited steeds attached.

Upon the driver's seat sat a grim figure; the carriage door was open, and just at that moment, at a rustle in the shrubbery lining the road, two forms—one hurrying, the other reluctant—stepped into view.

"Here is the carriage," spoke the former of the twain.

"A man! Lytle; the midnight carriage!" gasped Burgoyne with a violent start. "I begin to understand!"

He was about to rush forward impetuously, when a thrilling voice checked him.

The companion of Colonel Lytle, drawing back free from his detaining grasp, shrank timorously.

"Why have you brought me here?" she cried. "You said you wished to give me some instructions from my guardian, Richard Sheldon, and——"

"I intend to take you to him, instead!" answered Lytle, suddenly seizing the girl, and dragging her towards the open door of the vehicle.

"I will not go! I will not go!" shrieked Patrice, wildly struggling in Lytle's grasp like a fluttering dove in the net of the fowler. "Mrs. Loring—*Adrian!* Help! help!"

CHAPTER XV.

KIDNAPPED.

AMID her fervent terror and helplessness, Patrice Ringold had well-nigh betrayed the identity of the man who lingered so near to her that he could have touched her flowing tresses of gold.

For an instant, the mandate of the sweet lips framing his name for the first time acted upon the impetuous Burgoyne as would a battle-cry to a valiant knight. With one blow he could send the scoundrel, Lytle, sprawling at his feet. A flash of prudence, of caution, stayed his impulse, however, and, as Lytle spoke, curiosity to learn if he had noticed what Patrice said, held Adrian Burgoyne's clenched hand in abeyance.

Apparently the schemer had not caught the word that would have aroused his keenest suspicions, amid Patrice's incoherent utterances.

"Stop!" he ordered with a savage scowl. "You can gain nothing by alarming others. I appear here as the authorised agent of your relative, Richard Sheldon. I am taking you to him——"

"I will not go! You cannot compel me!" panted Patrice wildly.

"Yes, I can. I have the legal power, girl!" And Lytle glowered down into the fine, shrinking face darkly. "You have deceived me."

"I—oh! let me go! You frighten—you terrify me!"

"It may well be so. You are playing a double game, and I know it!" hissed Lytle menacingly. "You pretend to have lost the alphabet key. I doubt it. Even if so, you can remember it, if you would. You have some friend, some lover, who is in a secret scheme with you to defeat my plans, for I saw a man skulking in the garden an hour ago, and that hastened my departure. You *will* tell the truth, however! Once Sheldon demands it, you will reveal what you know—what you are hiding from us—or he will make you wish you had. Into the carriage, I say! Sheldon shall decide this muddle. In with you!"

Slam.

"Drive on!"

Crack! went the driver's whip. The spirited steeds sprang from their haunches. Adrian Burgoyne started forward with a gasp of dismay, a moment too late.

So quickly had Lytle forced Patrice into the carriage, sprung in himself, slammed the door of the vehicle to, and given the order to the driver to start, that Burgoyne, about to dart forward and rescue the struggling girl, was grazed by the whirling wheels, and brushed, unnoticed and baffled, to one side.

The frantic shriek for help of the kidnappped girl mingled with the grinding of the wheels and the clattering hoofs of the horses.

"He is taking her away to torture, to imprison her, to wrest her secret from her lips!" gasped Burgoyne in alarm. "It shall not be. The driver is in his pay, a mute, faithful ally; but, ten to one, or ten against one, I will balk his designs!"

Down the smooth, hard country road, in pursuit of the fast-disappearing vehicle, sped Burgoyne. The practised steeds seemed to fairly fly on their course. They outdistanced the runner, expert and determined as he was, and, turning a curve in the road, were lost to sight finally, their

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echoing hoofs, beating out a swift flight, being the only reminder of even their remote proximity.

Still the pursuer kept on. He was gasping for breath now, wild-eyed, frantic, in despair. He must not lose trace of Lytle! Such men plotted to succeed, and once again imprisoned in some safe retreat, he would have all the difficult work of finding Patrice once more to do.

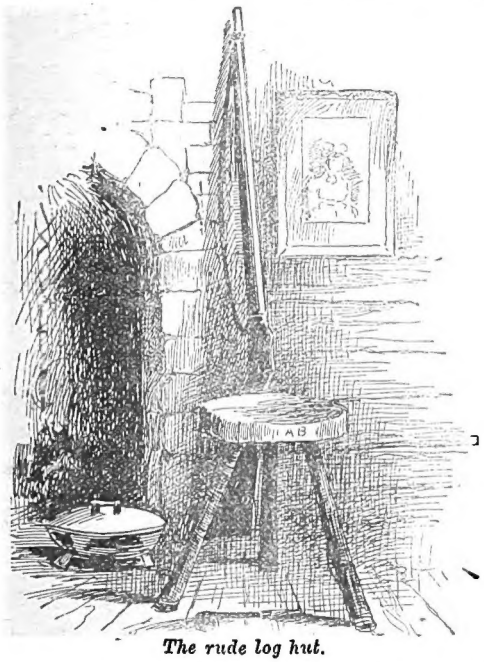
Besides, she was no match for such deft schemers. In an inadvertent moment she might drop a hint as to his escape, and the meshes of the law would again close about him.

For an hour Burgoyne sped on. He was forced to rest twice from sheer exhaustion. Just as he turned a curve in the highway he uttered a joyful cry.

A few hundred yards ahead, and about to strike off into a road leading through a dense belt of timber to the lights of a distant hamlet, he made out the carriage he had shadowed.

A broken trace had delayed it, and patching it up, the driver was making for the nearest town, to secure a new one.

Burgoyne dashed ahead at a new spurt of speed. A grim,



The rude log hut.

resolute glitter shone in his eye, as at last his hands closed round the rear bar of the vehicle.

It was a closed carriage. Even the conventional little back window was not present. As he clung there, and ran along to keep pace with the carriage, he heard the low, pitiful moans of one of its occupants.

Poor Patrice, unheeded, and unhindered by her grim, watchful captor, lay back among the cushions, wailing despairingly.

The utterance fired the heart of her companion to renewed zeal and determination. Desperate resources were called for. Once the hamlet ahead was reached, a renewal of the former rapid progress of the vehicle would defeat all plans of pursuit or attack.

Force must be met with force. Upon the issue of the passing hour depended all his own future, as well as that of the stricken, terrified creature whose sighs pierced his heart like a searing, red-hot iron!

With a light spring, Burgoyne lifted himself clear of the ground, and secured a foothold on the rear axle, a firm clasp across the top of the carriage.

Clinging there, he peered ahead.

The driver, absorbed in directing his horses safely down the brambly, branch-sheltered road, was too intent on his task to notice him.

Burgoyne formed a speedy plan of procedure. He would climb noiselessly over the top of the vehicle, reach the driver's seat encircle his neck with one arm, suddenly choke and menace him to silence and submission, gag and secure him, stop the horses, boldly attack the villain within the vehicle, and rescue and fly with Patrice.

It was the one desperate, the only means of accomplishing a tangible result—by force and strategy.

He crept over the glassy roof of the carriage. It swayed into a rut and out of it at that moment, starting up the horses, but Burgoyne preserved a safe equilibrium.

He reached out one hand to grasp the driver round the neck.

Just then an unforeseen accident occurred.

He felt the horses spring forward. He saw the driver evade his clutch by suddenly ducking down his head.

Not to escape him, however. No; the driver was blissfully ignorant of the free passenger he was carrying along the rutty, unfrequented road.

An overhanging branch had brushed dangerously near to the top of the carriage, and he saw it in time, and it barely swept clear of his head.

Too late, Adrian Burgoyne saw it also. He tried to evade it, was caught by it, swept along by it, hurled over the back of the carriage, struck the ground with a thud.

Then he knew no more, and the carriage sped forward, leaving the brave but baffled champion of a loved one's cause bleeding, senseless, and unnoticed in the middle of the dark and lonely country road.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUND.

AN hour of paradise—a lifetime in an abyss of despair!

Slowly through the confused, aching brain of Adrian Burgoyne that sentiment forced its way with the first waking moment of consciousness and reason.

All, all was lost! The woman he loved was in the power of bold, unscrupulous enemies, the precious key to the enigma of the secret cipher was gone, he himself lay helpless among strangers; all the bright promises of that fervent, delightful hour that he had passed learning to worship the purity, the beauty, the devotion of Patrice Ringold, had vanished into the blackest gulf of hollow, haunting misery.

Where was he? What space of time had elapsed since he had striven to rescue the kipnapped Patrice, and had been swept from the roof of the speeding carriage, like a leaf in the storm.

He projected the query vaguely, aloud, but in a weak, pained tone, and he opened his eyes, as the response came promptly, to view the walls of a rude log hut, and its ruder inmate, a brawny, honest-faced man, sharpening an axe at the hearth.

"You're in my bunk, which I've slept on the floor in consequence," came the bluff, candid avowal. "My daughter has been looking after you as well as doing her other work. Not that I mind it, partner—I ain't quite that heartless—only you've been at it day and night, nearly until yesterday, and I couldn't sleep even there."

"At what?" asked Burgoyne vaguely.

"Raving—stark staring delirious. First it was gaol—then a boat—then a gal. My! how you did carry on about that gal! Better?"

A shade of anxiety crossed Burgoyne's face at the allusions of his new acquaintance. He understood now. The fall from the roof of the carriage had been a fall to injury and illness. Perhaps the overstraining experience of preceding days of adventure, exposure, and suffering had aided a climax of unconsciousness and delirium.

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"Don't fret," spoke the man again. "I didn't understand the gist of your wanderings. You've told no secrets. You see, I'm a woodchopper. Found you in the road. Brought you here. Nursed you since. Better?"

"I hope so. And how long have I been here?"

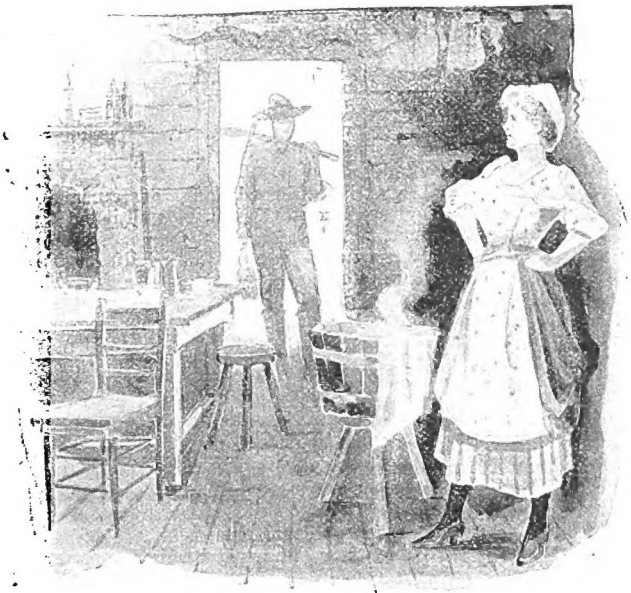
"Just eight days."

"Heavens!"

The disclosure fairly appalled Burgoyne. He uttered a dispirited moan, and sank back helpless.

"And if you care to go round again in good shape," advised his bluff nurse, "you'll lay still another eight days. Oh! don't think of intruding on me. It's rough fare, but you're welcome to it."

The week that ensued was one of torturing doubt, agony, and suspense to the convalescent wanderer. He looked less



"My daughter has been looking after you."

than ever like the Adrian Burgoyne of convict garb, as he one morning started from the hut, leaving with his kind-hearted friend half the little store of money he possessed, and his sincerest gratitude.

Somehow he seemed changed, even to himself. The hours of patient, though galling inactivity spent in convalescence had afforded him an abundance of time for reflection, and he had passed already through the chastening furnace of fear, dread, and suspense. With the calm courage of undaunted resolve had come the assurance of final victory. His one thought was of Patrice. If he could find her, if he could only place her beyond the possible power of harm or persecution from her enemies, he would be content.

And why might he not find her? She had probably been removed to the city, within the shadow of Richard Sheldon's subtle craftiness. All he could hope to gain from his prisoner was a knowledge of the cipher alphabet. Once satisfied that she did not possess it, or a memory of it, he might cast her adrift, or even return her to the obscurity of her own cottage.

At all events, he would watch the plotters, shadow them, penetrate their secrets, gain a clue to the whereabouts of their fair prisoner.

Burgoyne set his face citywards. Then he faltered.

"The lost Bible cover!" he murmured concernedly. "It is almost useless to think of searching for it after this lapse of time, but I am near the place where I cast it away. Yes, I will make a final search for it."

He reached the vicinity of the district school-house, and went all over the playground once more. He sighed sadly as he failed to discover a trace of the coveted book-cover.

"Some one has picked it up," he reflected, "and has thrown it aside again as valueless. The rain, the wind have scattered it in fragments. That ends the quest for Ralph Ringold's hidden fortune!"

He was wearied with the long walk and the arduous search. At the edge of a meadow he sat down to rest, reflect, and recuperate.

Fifty feet distant was a group of urchins engaged in flying a kite. The brisk, clear breeze had sent their paper kite aloft like a bird. It swayed in the far azure like a living winged creature.

He watched them casually, aimlessly. He started into a token of kindly interest in their boyish sports as two members of the little throng massed about the proud owner of the kite, came timidly towards him.

"I say, Mister," began one of them, and then he paused, abashed at Burgoyne's lifted gaze, and dug his bare toes into the loose dirt in an embarrassed way.

"Have you got a pocket-knife?" supplemented his bolder companion, completing the appeal.

"I think I have," responded Burgoyne accommodatingly. "What do you wish?"

"We've been sending messengers up on the kite, and we want to send some more," vouchsafed the lad.

Burgoyne understood. By "messengers" the boy meant square or circular pieces of paper or cardboard. A hole would be made through these, the string run through it, and the wind would blow the whirling fragments clear up to the kite.

"I want the knife to rip off this cloth, and cut out a piece of the pasteboard under it," continued the boy. "It's heavy, but it'll do, and——"

"What is it?"

"A book cover."

"What!"

With a vehemence that fairly shocked the urchin, Adrian Burgoyne snatched from his hand the dark, fluttering object he had exhibited.

"It cannot be!" he gasped, almost inarticulate with powerful, overwhelming emotion. "Yes, it is—the lost book-cover!"

The missing Bible cover! Yes, there it was; he recognised it in a flash. Dew and damp had defaced it, the trampling of many feet had dented and disfigured it; but even yet, inside, he could trace in faint outline the inscription he had read that fateful morning after meeting Patrice Ringold—"From her loving mother."

With trembling fingers he spread it open. His soul in his eyes, he delved into its rear compartment—a flap-pocket formed of a piece of cloth.

Would he find it? Had the mistreated receptacle of a mighty secret kept close and sure the sacred, vital trust?

He groped, he shook the cover roughly, he tore the cloth lining apart, and then——

A heartrending groan escaped his lips, and he fell back, nerveless.

He had found the Bible cover, but the inclosure, the precious, treasured key—was gone!

(To be continued.)

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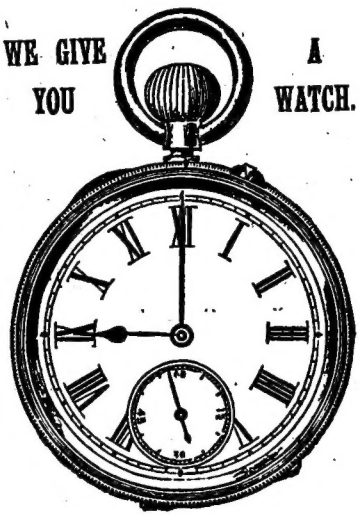

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